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HAPPEN AGAIN

• • •  
WILLIAM DE MORGAN







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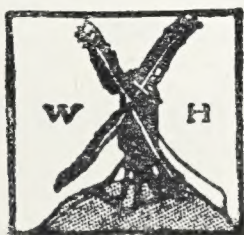
# It Never Can Happen Again

By

William De Morgan

Author of

"Joseph Vance," "Alice-for-Short," "Somehow Good"



In Two Volumes

Vol. I

Toronto

Henry Frowde

1909





*NOT IN RESPECT OF ANYTHING ITS PAGES  
CONTAIN, BUT SOLELY IN REMEMBRANCE  
OF TWO LONG CONCURRENT LIVES AND AN  
UNINTERRUPTED FRIENDSHIP, THIS BOOK  
IS DEDICATED BY ITS AUTHOR TO THE  
MEMORY OF*

RALPH EARL OF LOVELACE





# CONTENTS OF VOL. I

## CHAPTER I

	PAGE
OF LIZARANN COUPLAND, HER FATHER AND HER FAMILY. OF HIS PREVIOUS STORY, AND LIZARANN'S BIRTH . . . . .	1

## CHAPTER II

OF JIM'S MATCH-SELLING, AND HOW HE CAME TO TAKE TO IT. HOW HE WALKED HOME WITH LIZARANN . . . . .	13
--	----

## CHAPTER III

OF ROYD HALL, AND ITS LITERARY GUEST WHO HAD AN IMPOSSIBLE WIFE . . . . .	28
--	----

## CHAPTER IV

OF MISS ARKROYD AND HER AVIARY. HOW MR. CHALLIS WALKED IN THE GARDEN WITH HER. OF MR. TRIPTOLEMUS WRAXALL. AND OF HOW MR. CHALLIS WROTE TO HIS WIFE . . . . .	43
---	----

## CHAPTER V

OF A RAINY DAY AT ROYD. HOW A MOTOR-CAR CAME TO GRIEF. HOW MISS ARKROYD'S MOTHER WENT TO THANES CASTLE AND SHE HERSELF DIDN'T . . . . .	54
---	----

## CHAPTER VI

OF THE GRAUBOSCHIAN PHILOSOPHY. HOW JUDITH ARKROYD WALKED WITH MR. CHALLIS TO THE RECTORY. HOW HE SAID NOTHING ABOUT HIS WIFE BEING HIS DECEASED WIFE'S SISTER. HOW HE WAS OUT OF HIS ELEMENT AT THE RECTORY. SALADIN AND HIS CAT. HIS HEDGEHOG . . . . .	66
---	----

## CHAPTER VII

OF OTHER GUESTS AND THEIR TALK. OF A SOFA-HAVEN AND HOW MISS ARKROYD PERCEIVED THAT MR. CHALLIS COULD WRITE A TRAGEDY. BEAUTY A MATTER OF OPINION . . . . .	88
---	----

## CHAPTER VIII

PAGE

OF HOW NO ACCIDENT HAD REALLY HAPPENED TO THE MOTOR-CAR. OF A COMBAT BETWEEN TWO SISTERS, CHIEFLY ABOUT THOSE OF PEOPLE'S DECEASED WIVES. OF FLIRTATIONS WITH MARRIED MEN. HOW CHALLIS WROTE A LONG AMUSING LETTER TO MARIANNE . . . . .	103
--	-----

## CHAPTER IX

HOW MARIANNE SHOWED THAT LETTER TO AN INTIMATE FRIEND, MRS. ELDRIDGE. WHERE WAS THAT SOFA? OF COUNTRY AND TOWN HOUSES. JEALOUSY . . . . .	117
---	-----

## CHAPTER X

CHALLIS'S <i>adieu</i> TO MISS ARKROYD. A LONG RIDE HOME, AND A COLD WELCOME. BUT IT WAS JOLLY TO BE BACK, AT ANY RATE. MISS ARKROYD'S MESSAGE DELIVERED . . . . .	139
--	-----

## CHAPTER XI

VATTED RUM CORNER, AND CHESTNUTS. A YOUNG TURK. HOW LIZARANN TOLD MOTHER GROVES OF THE FLYING DUTCHMAN. OF AN AMBULANCE, AND WHAT WAS IN IT. HOW LIZARANN WENT HOME WITHOUT DADDY . . . . .	157
--	-----

## CHAPTER XII

HOW UNCLE BOB HAD THE HORRORS. HOW LIZARANN ATE COLD CHESTNUTS IN BED. DELIRIUM TREMENS. HOW JIM COULD SEE AT NIGHT, AND WAS UNDER THE BED. POLICE! . . . . .	172
---	-----

## CHAPTER XIII

HOW THE RECTOR OF ROYD TOOK A WRONG TURNING, AND PICKED UP LIZARANN IN THE SNOW. MR. STEPTOE'S KNIFE, AND HOW LIZARANN MADE HIM LEAVE HOLD OF IT. HOW AUNT STINGY WAS HANDY IN CASE OF ANYTHING, AND UNCLE BOB WENT TO SLEEP ON A SECOND-HAND SOFA . . . . .	189
--	-----

## CHAPTER XIV

OF THE END OF THE BLIZZARD, AND OF SIMON MAGUS. HOW MR. TAYLOR FOUND A DOCTOR. OF A CHASE THROUGH THE SNOW, AND A CANAL LOCK. WHAT WAS FOUND IN IT. BUT SIMON WAS INVISIBLE . . . . .	203
--	-----



## CHAPTER XV

	PAGE
HOW LIZARANN WAS TAKEN TO MISS FOSSETT'S, BUT HAD A STITCH IN HER SIDE, AND WASN'T TO GO TO DADDY TO-DAY. HOW THE RECTOR WENT TO JIM IN THE HOSPITAL, AND JIM WAS DISAPPOINTED ABOUT HIM . . . . .	217

## CHAPTER XVI

BREAKFAST IN GROSVENOR SQUARE. STRAINED RELATIONS OF TWO SISTERS. A BATTLE INTERRUPTED. SAMARIA A GOOD-NATURED PLACE. WHO WAS TO PAY? . . . . .	235
---	-----

## CHAPTER XVII

LADY ARKROYD'S VISIT TO JIM. GOODY TALK. JIM AND HIS MAKER. HOW MR. TAYLOR VISITED ANOTHER CASE. A DEATH-BED CONFESSION . . . . .	248
---	-----

## CHAPTER XVIII

THAT NASTY LITTLE STETHOSCOPE! A RETROSPECT ABOUT THE RECTOR AND MISS FOSSETT. A TRANSACTION IN KISSES. AUNT STINGY'S WEEDS, AND WHAT A GOOD COOK SHE WAS . . . . .	262
---	-----

## CHAPTER XIX

HOW AUNT STINGY BECAME MARIANNE'S COOK. A MOST OFFENSIVE BIBLE CLASS. MR. CHALLIS'S JUDITH. ESTRILD AND THE OSTROGOTHS. THE ACROPOLIS CLUB . . . . .	273
--	-----

## CHAPTER XX

MRS. ELDRIDGE IN FULL BLOW. THE IMPROPER STUDY OF MANKIND. NOTHING REALLY WRONG! AN IDENTIFICATION WITH A VENGEANCE. HOW CHALLIS CAME HOME LATE . . . . .	289
---	-----

## CHAPTER XXI

HOW JIM RETURNED HOME, ALL BUT ONE LEG, AND LIZARANN CALLED ON HIM. HAD THE DEVIL GOT UNCLE BOB? HOW BRIDGETTICKS HAD HEARD OF A SCHEME FOR LIZARANN'S BENEFIT . . . . .	307
--	-----

CHAPTER XXII

	PAGE
THE EXACT STORY OF CHALLIS'S FIRST WIFE'S FIRST MARRIAGE. HOW HE AND MARIANNE MISSED THEIR EXPLANATION. CHAR- LOTTE THE DETECTIVE. CHALLIS'S SECOND COURTSHIP, IN A NUTSHELL . . . . .	322

CHAPTER XXIII

HOW CHALLIS CALLED ON MISS ARKROYD IN GROSVENOR SQUARE. A SPRAINED ANKLE. ON THE EDGE OF A PRECIPICE. KING SOLOMON AND HIS DJINN BOTTLE . . . . .	331
---	-----

CHAPTER XXIV

HOW MARIANNE WENT TO TULSE HILL. OF BOB'S PHONOGRAPH, AND HOW HE POSTED A LETTER TO JUDITH. OF MARIANNE'S RETURN, AND MORE MISUNDERSTANDING. BUT IT WOULD BE ALL RIGHT IN THE MORNING . . . . .	346
--	-----

CHAPTER XXV

OF AN UNCALLED FAMILY ROW, AND HOW BOB'S BREAKFAST WAS POSTPONED. OF A LETTER FROM JUDITH THAT MADE MATTERS WORSE . . . . .	367
---	-----

CHAPTER XXVI

AT ROYD AGAIN. THE BREAD OF IDLENESS. A GOOD PLAIN COOK. A DIALOGUE BETWEEN A PRIEST AND A PROFANE AUTHOR. THE RECTORY AND ITS GUEST, LIZARANN. HOW THE CARRIAGE DIDN'T STOP . . . . .	377
---	-----

CHAPTER XXVII

HOW JUDITH'S STAGE MANIA HAD COOLED. TROUT BEND, AND A TICKLISH INTERVIEW. HALF-A-MILE OFF TEA. A DISCUSSION ON RELIGIOUS EDUCATION . . . . .	394
---	-----



## CHAPTER I

LIZARANN COUPLAND did not know what her father's employment was ; but she knew that, every morning, she saw him to the corner of Bladen Street, put his left hand on the palin's of number three, and left him to shift for himself. She was on honour not to watch him down Bladen Street, and she had a keen sense of honour. She also knew by experience that when her aunt, Mrs. Steptoe, said she would learn her a lesson she wouldn't easy forget, Mrs. Steptoe was not referring to teacher-book instruction like at school. And this lesson, Lizarann understood, would be imparted by her aunt with some blunt instrument, perhaps a slipper, in case she failed to observe her promise. She was not to go spyin' and starin' after Father no farther than where it was wrote up " Old Vatted Rum, fivepence-halfpenny " at the Green Man and Still. It was a compact, and Lizarann observed it—always running away as fast as possible to get out of reach of temptation as soon as ever her father's fingers closed on the knob of a particular low paling. It was a paling good to turn upside down over, which affirmed the territorial rights of the Green Man over a certain six-foot foreshore of pavement liable else to be claimed by the Crown, or the Authority.

Lizarann's father, James Coupland, was stone-blind, and the reason she was sent with him every morning was because he had to cross Cazenove Street, and Dartley Street, and Trott Street, before you come to pavement all the way, and it wasn't safe. As soon as you got to the Green Man, why, there you were ! Only like touchin' the wall, and your stick on the right, and on you kep' direck. But as to what Lizarann's father did, at some place on this side of the next bad crossing, his six-year-old daughter never could guess. All she knew was that she was useful, and assisted towards some public object, not easily under-

stood by a little girl, when she piloted her father to and from his starting-point of continuous pavement, as a ship through shoals and cross-currents, to the mouth of a canal. But the metaphor of Lizarann's flight when she left the ship to its captain is not an easy one. If only metaphors would not be so lob-sided !

That her father was a suppliant for public charity was a surmise that never crossed Lizarann's mind. An idea can be got of how she thought of him by any young lady who knows, for instance, that her father is in the Custom-House, but who has never seen the Custom-House, and has no idea what he does there ; or even by one who, having for parent a sexton, and being kept in ignorance of his functions, conceives of him as the Archbishop of Canterbury ; or more easily—to take yet another parallel—by one situated like Lizarann's little friend Bridgetticks, down a turnin' out of Trott Street, whose grandfather was in an almshouse ; but who was inflated past all bearing by his livery or uniform when the old chap was out for his holiday, and Bridget was allowed to walk with him all along Trott Street and round the Park. There was no abidin' of her, struttin' about !

“ My grandfather's richer than your father,” said Bridgetticks, after one such occasion, “ and he's got his heyesight, too.”

“ Fathers are better than grandfathers,” said Lizarann. “ Fathers goes down Bladen Street holdin' on to nuffin', and ain't they rich, neither ? My father he fetches home nine shillings in coarpers. Aunt Stingy, she let Uncle Steptoe get at it, and he laid some of it out in gin.” The name of this aunt, as Lizarann pronounced it, seemed to ascribe a waspish character to its owner rather than a parsimonious one.

“ You lyin' little thing, how you ever can !” exclaimed Bridgetticks. This was because the daring sum of nine shillings took her aback. But on consideration another line of tactics seemed more effective. “ Nine shillin's ain't nothin',” she said. “ My grandfather, he's got an allowance regular, *he* has.”

Lizarann paused before replying. She was confronted with an unforeseen thing, foreign to human experience.



What *was* an allowance ? On the whole, it would be better to keep clear of it. She changed the *venue* of the discussion. "He's dressed up, he is," she said. But she spoke with diffidence, too, and her friend felt conciliated.

"Dressed up's a falsehood," she said, but without asperity. "If you'd 'a said cloze like the Lord Mayor's Show, now ! But little infant-school pippings like you don't know nothink." Lizarann felt put upon her mettle.

"My father," she said, "he's got a board with wrote upon. Hangs it round his neck, he does. Like on Harthurses carts and the milk."

"You never see it on his neck, nor yet you can't read. You can't read the words on Arthurses cart." But Lizarann could read one—the middle one—and did it, a syllable at a time : "Prov-i-ded." It was correct, and a triumph for the decipherer. But she was doomed to humiliation. Bridgetticks was a great reader, like Buckle, and could read what was wrote on milk-carts all through.

"Any little biby could read *that* ! You can't read 'fammy-lies,' nor yet 'dyly.' It's no use your tryin'." But Lizarann felt unhappy, and yearned for Culture, and tried very hard to read "families" and "daily" on each side of "provided," while Bridgetticks gave attention to a doll's camp on the doorstep. But "families" is very hard to read—you know it is !—and Lizarann quite forgot to put back a beautiful piece of stick-liquorice in her mouth during her efforts to master it.

Anybody would have thought, to look along Tallack Street, where this colloquy took place, that the announcement on Arthurses cart "Families provided daily" was followed out literally by Arthurs, and that that Trust or Syndicate was driving a brisk trade in the families it provided daily. To-day was a holiday at the Board school, and the whole street teemed with prams. And in every pram was one biby, or more, assimilating Arthurses milk. But they themselves had not been provided by Arthurs ; merely the milk.

The prams were nearly the only vehicles in Tallack Street, which ran straight acrost from the railway-arch to the 'Igh Road, parallel-like, as you might say, to Trott Street. Even Arthurses cart wasn't a real cart, only drove by hand.



A nearer approach to an ideal was the coal, which came behind a horse, and sold itself for a shillin' a hundred, more or less, accordin' as the season. The scales, they'd weigh down to twenty-eight pound, if you didn't want to have capital lying idle; but then it was a sight easier to be cheated at that, and you could always bring two coal-scuttles, and if one of 'em *was* wore through, why, a stout bit of brown paper, coverin' in the hole, and there you were! Because the dropping of fragments of coal on the pavement was not only wasteful, but giv' them boys something to aim with. Ammunition was scarce, owing to the way the road was kep'; similar, them boys took every opportunity.

There were two other vehicles that were known to Tallack Street. One came every day with a drum, and sold vegetables. The proprietor had made himself hoarse, many years since, with shouting about the freshness of his stock between the outbreaks on the drum, and, as life advanced and his lung-power declined, the drum-performances encroached on the oratory. This suited a large majority of the inhabitants, conveying a sense of Life—was, in fact thought almost equal to the Play—by those who had been to it—and was so appreciated by Lizarann and Bridget-ticks that they would petition to be allowed to stand in contact with the drum to feel the noise inside of 'em like.

The other vehicle was, however, the climax of the Joy of Living in Tallack Street, only it demanded a 'apeny a time, and you had to save up. But if you could afford it, it was rapture. How describe it? Well, it was drawed by a donkey, and went round and round and round. You yourself, and your friends, sat on truncated chairs at the end of radial spokes rotating horizontally on a hub, which played melancholy tunes, and you could tell what they were by looking, because there was the ticket of it, every time a new tune come. But the execution supplied no clue, or very little, to its identity.

Tallack Street, as you will have inferred, was a cul-de-sac, and therefore very popular as a playground with the children of the neighbourhood. It ended in a dead wall, formerly enclosing an extinct factory, which had survived

the coming of the railway, by which it had been acquired, and for some reason spared; about which factory, or, rather, its remains, an understanding had been current for about a generation that it could be took on lease from the Company, and adapted as workshops. The board was almost illegible, except one word "inquire," of no value apart from its sequel, which anyone who could read would have told you at once was a name and address; but as to what name and what address, it would have taken a scollard to tell that.

There came occasionally to Tallack Street a lady, who appeared to Lizarann to make her way into her Aunt Steptoe's home on insufficient pretexts. She certainly was not the sort of lady to get her shoes mended by a working cobbler in a suburban slum, and Lizarann made no pretence of understanding her. She saw very little of any of her aunt's visitors, because she was always sent, or bundled, out the moment they appeared, and only allowed in the house again after their departure.

She was interested and pleased, therefore, when this lady, who was dressed quite beautiful, developed as a friend of Teacher, the familiar spirit of the Dale Road Schools, where this little girl was learning to sew quite beautiful. She was still more interested when she became aware that the conversation between these two ladies related to her own family. Teacher and the lady talked out quite loud close to her—as if she didn't matter, bless you!

"All the streets are not as bad as Tallack Street," said the lady. "And all the houses in Tallack Street are not so bad as that house at the end. People named Townroe, I think—awful people!"

"Do you mean Steptoe?"

"Oh yes—Steptoe. I've tried to talk to the woman, and it's perfectly useless. You can't do anything when the man's in the way. And as for him—well, you know Adeline, when these people don't attend either church or chapel, it's simply hopeless. There's nothing to begin upon."

"The man drinks. Of course!"

"Of course! He seemed sober, though, the only time I saw him, but very sulky. Oh dear!—he *was* trying."



“What did he say?”

“He wouldn’t say anything—wouldn’t answer! And he said to his wife: ‘You say a *something* word’—you understand, Adeline?—‘you say a something word, and see if I don’t smack your eye. You try it!’ My daughter talked for an hour, and then he said: ‘If you think you’ll sedooce me into committing of myself, you’ll find you’re mistook. So I should think better of it, if I was you. Yours werry truly, Robert Steptoe.’ Just as if he was writing a letter.” Both ladies laughed, and Lizarann pricked her finger badly, and it redded all over the ’em-stitch. But she couldn’t understand the laugh. She was not fond of her aunt’s husband; you can’t love pock-marks unless they have some counterpoise in beauty of disposition. But she had a certain spirit of partisanship about her belongings, too!

“I suppose the children go to some school—Board School or something,” said Teacher.

“They haven’t children, thank Heaven! these people,” said the outside lady. “But there’s a little girl—somehow—with a father. They said she came here—at least, I suppose the ‘school-house up the road’ meant here.”

“Then she must be here now. What was her name? Did you make out?”

“Eliza Ann something—Doubleday, I think, as near as I can recollect. No, it wasn’t Doubleday. What could it have been? . . .” And this lady tapped one hand with the other, to keep on showing how hard she was thinking.

“Was it Eliza Ann Coupland? Come here, Lizarann, and tell the lady if it was you.”

Lizarann approached by instalments, in awe. She had received false impressions from the conversation—one that her uncle could write a letter, and this lady knew it. A second that her aunt’s children—if any—would have been all over little sand-pits that would catch and hold the grime awful, like their father, and that therefore we ought to be thankful. A third that she was a “little girl somehow,” and she had never been told that she was one somehow, only that she was a little girl.

“Are you the little girl?” said the lady.

“I don’t know, miss,” said Lizarann. She thought the



lady seemed impatient. And whom did she mean by "they" when she said "Oh dear!—how trying they are!"?

"Ought I to tell her to say 'My lady,' or not?" said Teacher.

"Oh, bother!" said the lady. "What does your father do, my dear? You're a nice little thing, only your mouth's too big."

Timid murmurs came from the catechumen. "What's that you say? Father goes out to work? What does father go out to work at?"

"That's impossible!" said Teacher. "Her father's blind, and she leads him about."

"I hope you're not telling stories, child, like the rest, because I like you all except your mouth. Come close here, so that I can hear you, and tell me what your father does. Only don't splutter or gabble!"

Whereupon Lizarann gave her version of her father's professional employment. She knew she was to say, if pressed on the point, that her father was "an asker," and she said it, standing first on one leg and then on the other uneasily. She had a mixture of misgiving and confidence that the statement would be sufficient; just as you or I might have felt in stating, for instance, that our father was an apparitor, or a stevedore, or a turnover-at-press. But she had absolutely no idea of the meaning of her phrases.

"What on earth does the child mean? Say it again, small person!" Thus the lady.

"A asker!" The child had the name perfectly clear, and added "Yass!"—to drive it home—with eyes of assurance standing wide open. Both ladies made her repeat it, and asked her what she meant by it; but she evidently did not know. They pondered and speculated, till on a sudden a light broke. "Is it possible she means a *beggar*?" said Miss Fossett. Then the two of them spoke in an undertone, and Lizarann felt that her family affairs were being discussed over her head, but by creatures too great for her to take exception to, or even to interpret. Presently the lady addressed her again:

"What does he ask for, little stuffy? Yes, you may come as close as that. What does he ask for, child?"

Thereat Lizarann, in support of her family credit, said:

“ He took all of nine shillings in coarpers once on a time.” She couldn’t compete with the lady in birth and position, but she had a proper pride in her race, for all that.

The lady and Miss Fossett looked at one another, and the latter said : “ It’s quite possible. They do sometimes.” And Lizarann felt flattered and that she had done her duty. And that when she told her father, he would certainly give her a peppermint-drop. She had a sense of an improved position as she went back to her sewing. But the two ladies went on talking about her under their breath, and she fancied they were resuming some incidents of the previous Saturday at Tallack Street. Teacher seemed to have heard something of them, and she now connected them with her pupil. As the lady ripened towards departure she became more audible.

“ It only shows the truth of what I’m always saying to Sir Murgatroyd. How can you *expect* them to be any better when they have such wretched homes ? Give them air and light and sanitation and things, and then talk goody to them if you like. . . . Oh dear !—I must rush. I’ve promised to go with Sibyl and those Inglis girls to Hurlingham this afternoon.” Then the lady had a recrudescence of her perception that Lizarann was funny, for she turned round, going away, to say to Miss Fossett : “ Oh dear, how funny they are ! Fancy an Asker !” and, as it were, fell a little into Miss Fossett’s bosom to find sympathy, afterwards kissing her, and saying, “ But how good you are !” rather gushily, and making off. She did say, however, to Lizarann : “ Good-bye, little person ! Consider I’ve kissed you. I would, only it’s such a sticky day.”

Much of this conversation would have been quite unintelligible to the child, even if she had heard the whole of it. Her mind was not prepared to receive it, as, not having had much time to reflect since her birth, she had not noticed that her domestic life had anything exceptional about it. Extension of her social circle had not, so far, convinced her that there was anything unusual in their rows and quarrels ; in fact, she was gently creeping on to a belief that Steptoes—their inclusive name—was the rule, and the balance of the Universe the exception. But her



unconsciousness of the actual was liable to inroads from without, and that day at school roused the curiosity of an inquiring mind. Lizarann asked herself for the first time whether the conditions of her home-life were really normal, and nothing better was to be looked forward to in the future. No doubt Tallack Street would have sided with the lady in the views she expressed of any one house in it, though each house would have laid claim to an exceptional character for itself. But in the case of Steptoe's its unanimity would have been impressive; for Lizarann's Uncle Steptoe he'd be in liquor as often as not, and frequently aim a stool or suchlike at his wife's head—besides language you could hear the length of the street.

It does not follow that he had no provocation. Mrs. Steptoe was a fine study of the effect of exasperating circumstances on a somewhat uncertain temper, and Lizarann conceived of the result as a typical aunt. She had married, some twelve years since, from motives difficult of analysis, a cobbler who drank, towards whom she had always professed indifference. She seemed to have based a low opinion of all mankind on an assumption that they were none on 'em much better than her husband, and most of 'em were a tidy sight worse. If so, the tidiness of the sight might have disappointed orderly, old-fashioned folk. Not that Bob Steptoe was a bad sort when he was sober. Only that was so seldom.

Now, on the Saturday evening in question, this uncle by marriage of Lizarann, having previously taken too much beer, took too much whisky, and became quarrelsome. "A man ain't always answerable, look at it how you may!" said Tallack Street. Let us hope Mr. Steptoe was not, as on this occasion he loosened three of his wife's front teeth and indented the bridge of her nose. His blind brother-in-law, returning at this moment, personally conducted by his small daughter, was unable to see, but guessed that Steptoe was under restraint by neighbours, and from mixed sounds of pain and rage and inarticulate spluttering that his wife had been the victim of his violence. Poor Jim, mad with anger, besought the restraining party only to let him get hold of his brother-in-law, and he would give him what would recall him to his memory on future occasions.



Feeling the desirableness of this, they complied ; and Mr. Steptoe, when, after a painful experience of the superior strength of Jim, he got his head out of Chancery, felt ill, and was conducted to bed by his wife. Of whom Lizarann afterwards reported that, when she heard Uncle Bob get louder, Aunt Stingy, she said, " You do, and I'll call Jim back again," and then Uncle Bob he shut up.

This little girl's father had been in the Merchant Service and had lost his eyesight through an explosion of petroleum in the harbour at Cape Town. Current belief held that it was his own fault, saying that Jim Coupland hadn't any call to drop a lighted match into a hole in an oil-cask that was standing in the January sun ; still less was it necessary that he should look after it through the hole, and receive the full blast of the inevitable explosion in his face. He admitted these facts, but maintained that a hundred oil-casks might have exploded in his face, and no harm done if he had not, a few days before, seen the Flying Dutchman. This belief could not be shaken by argument, not even by the fact that the other men on his watch, all of whom had seen the Phantom Ship, had retained their eyesight intact. Didn't old Sam Nuttall—and nobody could pretend he hadn't been forty years in the Navy—say the very first thing of all, when he told him he'd seen the Dutchman : " Look you here, my son," he said, " you've got to look sharp and get yourself hanged or shot or drowned, if you want to die with eyes in your head " ? And warn't he right ? Anyhow, the coincidence of the accident a few days later had created a firm faith in the mind of Jim Coupland, and very few had the heart to try to shake it.

Whatever the cause, Jim Coupland came back eyeless from that voyage, and found his wife lately delivered of a female infant that did well, and became Lizarann. But her mother did ill, presumably, and the doctor that attended her did certainly, if the verdict of Tallack Street was warranted. She had no call to die, said Tallack Street. Perhaps its many matrons did not allow enough for the hideous shock of poor eyeless Jim's reappearance. She *did* die, and poor Jim, the happy bridegroom of a year ago, was left a widower at eight-and-twenty, hopelessly blind, with a baby he could never see.

Oh the tragedies Life's records have to show, that remain unpublished, and must do so!—all but a chance one or two, such as this one just outlined.

Lizarann was named after the ship her father made his last voyage in, or almost after it. The ship was the *Anne Eliza*, and the parson got the name wrong. Jim said it wasn't any odds, that he could reckon; and Mrs. Steptoe, his sister, said, on the contrary, it ran easier, took that way. So Lizarann she became, and Lizarann she remained. And the tale how father lost his eyesight through seeing the Flying Dutchman was the ever-present Romance of her youth, and would constantly creep into her conversation, even when the subject-matter thereof was already interesting—as, for instance, when she was discussing with Bridget-ticks an expected, or perhaps we should say proposed, addition to the family of Lizarann's doll, which had been fixed for the ensuing Sunday. There could be no doubt—as there is usually in the case of human parents—about the exact hour of arrival, as the Baby was ready dressed for the event her intended mother was looking forward to, in hypothetical retirement, on the house-doorstep. She and her friend were comparing notes on previous events of a like nature.

“Oh, you story!” said Lizarann, but not offensively—it was only current chat. “My father *says* I understand. He says I understand ship's victuals and port and starboard.” Grasp of these involved proficiency in other departments of thought, so the implication seemed to run. But Bridget wouldn't have it so.

“Ya'ar little silly!” she said, standing on the parapidge, and hanging to the riling, so as to project backwards into the little forecourt; you couldn't, speakin' accurately, call it a garden, but it had the feelin' about it, too. “Ya'ar little silly Simplicity Sairah in a track! Ship's victuals ain't nothing to understand, nor yet port and starboard! Wait till you can understand fly-wheels and subtraction engines! *They'll* make you sit up and talk!” This little girl's father was an engineer in charge of a steam-roller.

Bridget would have said the exact reverse if the two excursions into the relative fields of knowledge had been

exchanged between them. Lizarann respected her friend too much to conceive of her as a time-server, and her mind cast about to fortify her position on other lines.

“ My father he says I can understand the Flying Dutchman, and he seen her. Yass ! Afore ever he lost his heye-sight ! ”

“ He’s lyin’, then. Dutchmen ain’t women. I seen a picter-Dutchman in trowsers.” Lizarann cogitated gravely on this before she answered. “ A ship’s a her,” she then said. “ All ships is hers.” She then added, but not as a saddening fact, merely as a thing true and noticeable, “ He never seen me, father didn’t.”



## CHAPTER II

CAN anyone among us whose life is full of action, with Hope in his heart and Achievement on his horizon ; whose pillow whispers at night afterthoughts of a fruitful day, and on the day that follows can, without affectation, reproach the head that lies too long on it with having lost something precious that cannot be regained—can such a one conceive the meaning of blind or crippled life, that left Hope dead by the roadside long ago, and dares not look ahead to see the barren land ; whose pillow speaks no word about the past, but only welcome hints about oblivion, and a question with the daylight—why rise ? Why rise, indeed, and maybe miss a dream of a bygone day ? Better lie still, and thank God for the dream-world !

“ I wonder what that poor devil feels like,” said one first-class traveller outside the railway-station to another, who, like himself, gave the impression that he had plenty of luggage somewhere else, which was being well looked after by a servant whose wages were too high. Both were young men, well under twenty-five at a guess ; and though one was fair and the other was dark, and they were not the same height, and their features were not alike, still, the predominant force of their class-identity was so strong that individuality was lost in it, and most folk, seeing them *en passant* would have spoken of them thenceforth as “ those two young swells,” and dismissed them with an impression that either might be at any time substituted for the other without any great violence to contemporary history. They appeared to be sauntering to the train, and the poor devil was Jim Coupland, at his usual post by the long blank wall he used to feel his way down, after leaving Lizarann at the corner she might not pass. The wonderer had bought matches of Jim that he didn’t want

—for Jim was obliged to make a show of selling matches, to be within the law—and had returned change for sixpence, honourably offered by Jim. “I can’t see you, master,” said the blind man, “and I never shall, not if the sky falls, but I thank ye kindly. And I’ll tell my little lass on ye, home to-night.” It was the only recompense Jim had to offer, and he offered it.

“*I should kill myself straight off,*” said the other traveller. His speech was quite as consequent on his friend’s as most current speech is on its antecedent; you listen closely when you hear talk, and see if this is not the case! “Stop a bit! Don’t make me split this cigar. I haven’t got another, and nothing fit to smoke is procurable in this neighbourhood... there!—that’s right, now... The little chocket wouldn’t snickle out. Let’s see! What topic were we giving our powerful brains to? Oh, ah!—the blind beggar. You recollect the fellah?”

“Never saw him before, that I know of.”

“Perhaps you haven’t. I have. But you remember the two little girls?”

“Which two?”

“That morning we went to inquire about the railroad arch. Of course, you remember.” His friend assented. “Well!—that little girl is this chap’s kid. She’ll come in the evening to take him home. I’ve seen ’em about together, many a time.”

“I remember two little girls, where we went down that street my mother and sister slum in. Tallack Street. Which was the kid? The bony one with the nostril ajar, and the front teeth, that called you a cure?”

“No—the little plummy modest one, with both eyes stood open, and something to suck. Large dark eyes.” No really nice young man, such as we like, can ever mention a girl’s eyes, even a young child’s, without a shade of tenderness.

“What a sensitive youth you are, Scipio!” His friend sees through him. “The other was a little Jezebel.”

“Came out of Termagant’s egg, I should say. Isn’t there a bird called a Termagant? There ought to be.”

“I quite agree, but I doubt it. Well—to return to the point—you say you would kill yourself, straight off. How



do you know that ? You think you would now, but you wouldn't when it came to the scratch. This man doesn't want to kill himself."

"Because of the little girl. He'd kill himself fast enough if he had nothing to live for."

"My dear Scipio, that is sheer *petitio principii*. A man's having no wish at all to live takes his wish to die for granted. Unless he has an unnatural taste for mere equilibrium for its own sake. But the real point is that if you were this chap, you would have exactly the same inducements to live that he has—the little girl, for instance."

"Be calm, William ! Allow me to point out that you are begging the question yourself. The hypothetical form —'If you were this chap'—if interpreted to imply an exchange of identity in all particulars, takes for granted that what this chap does now I should do then. Clearly, I shouldn't kill myself, or shouldn't have done so up to date, as he hasn't. But the meaning of my remark is obvious to any mind not warped and distorted by casuistry. I refer more particularly to your own. Its meaning is that if I had two scabs instead of eyes, and was reduced to flattering the vanity of my fellow-countrymen in order to stimulate their liberality, I should by preference select Euthanasia." And he lighted his cigar, which had been waiting.

"I wish that little girl was here now, to call you a 'cure' again, Scipio. She did you a lot of good."

Jim Coupland heard as far as "I should kill myself straight off," which he certainly was not meant to do by the speakers. But neither of them were on their guard against the quickened hearing of the blind, and neither of them heard that Jim answered, though each had an impression the blind man was talking to himself. As for Jim, *his* impression was that his words reached. But then he had no means of knowing how far off the young men were, and that, as against the shrewdness of his own hearing, they were little better than deaf at that distance. What he said was :

"I was minded to, young Master, at the first go off. But the wish was on me strong for the voice of my wife, and the



lips of her. And when I lost her—ye understand—it was the cry of the baby new-born that held me. I'd be shamed to think upon it now, young Master. The day's bound to go by, and I mean to bide it out."

"Who are you lecterin' to? Polly—pretty Polly!" Thus an unfeeling fiend of a boy, who hears poor Jim talking to the empty air. But Jim, if he hears, does not heed him. His mind is far away, thinking of the dreadful day of his return to his wife and her week-old baby, and his coming to know that his mishap, announced by letter the day before, had been kept from her, and was still to tell. Of the ill-judged attempt to keep it from her yet a while, and let him be beside her in the half-dark. And the fatal sudden light of a fire that blazed out, and her cry of terror: "Oh, Jim, man, what have you done to your eyes?" . . .

Then of yet one more forlorn hope—the ill-wrought, ill-sustained pretext that this was but a passing cloud, a mere drawback of the hour, a thing that time would remedy—so ill-sustained that even in the few short days before her death Jim's wife had come to know that his eyes, stone-blind beyond a doubt, would never laugh into her face again, would never rest with hers upon the little face she longed to show him was so like his own. And then the end, and a grave in the parish burial-ground he could not see.

Then of a dream of the Valley of the Shadow of Death, and of a child's cry that reached him and called him back, even as he longed of his own free choice and will to plunge into its utter darkness. Then of a growth of ease—a sort of working ease to get through life with—and a term of reading, day by day, hour by hour, each tiniest change in the inflection of the baby's cry, until one day Lizarann, to whom it had occurred to glance round at the Universe she had been pitchforked into, burst into a not very well executed laugh at its expense, and made poor Jim for the first time fully conscious that he had a daughter.

It would be hard to tell all the struggles he went through before he could reconcile himself to a new position in life, mendicancy under pretence of match-selling. He did it at last, urged by grim necessity and Mrs. Steptoe. Perhaps we should say *stung* by the latter rather than *urged*, for her attitude was that, eyes or no eyes, if her brother wasn't

going to do a hand's turn for himself, he might pack up his traps and go, brat and all ! Who was he, that he was to eat his sister out of house and home ? And all because he was too proud to beg, forsooth ! Wasn't he begging already, and wasn't she alms-giving ? Yes !—only it was to be all underhanded ! Nothing fair or above-board ! Why should he be ashamed to ask the public for what he wasn't ashamed to take from two toiling relatives, the weaker of whom had suffered so much already from the disgusting drinking habits of the other ? Jim gave way, and found excuses for his sister—he always did—in these same disgusting habits. Perhaps he was right. Anyhow, he gave way. And an old mate of his faked him up the inscription afore-mentioned, and supplied the picture of the Flying Dutchman from his narrative of the incident. And well Jim remembered how the cord he hung it from his neck by got frayed and broke, and brought back to his mind another cord his hand once grasped, as he swayed to and fro at the weather ear-ring of a topsail ; and his wondering—would the frayed strands of the sheet hold under the great strain of his back-draw, or snap and fall with him into the black gulf that was hungering for him below ? He could hear again the music of the gale that sang in the shrouds, feel again the downward plunge of the hull into the trough of the sea, and breathe again the air that bore its flying foam. Then he thought to himself, would not a plunge into that black gulf, then and there, have been, after all, the best thing for him ? And answered his own thought without noting a strangeness in its wording : “ What !—and never seen my little lass ! ”

But the happy fancy that Jim did not beg, but only asked, took hold of the imagination. Of course he would not beg—he would scorn to do so—he, the strong seaman, who had lived a life of danger half of those whose footsteps passed him daily would have flinched to think of ! Why should he hesitate to ask of them what he would have given so freely to any one of them himself—to any one of them left in the dark ? So when Lizarann said to him one day, apropos of the fact that people's fathers were their aunt's brothers, “ Bridgettickses brother's a 'Orsekeeper. Are you a 'Orsekeeper ? ” He replied that he wasn't, exactly.



But he was an Asker, to *be* sure ! And the child, catching a sort of resemblance between the words, remembered it. And, referring to her Aunt Steptoe, got it confirmed. It served as a barrier for a time against an insight into the facts.

When poor Jim's speech was so brave of how the day was bound to go by, and he would bide it out, was his whole heart in his utterance ? Was there no reserve—no suppressed execration of that mysterious unsolicited Cause that had stunted him down to darkness after a short half-time of light ? At that moment he was conscious of none—a moment when he felt the world about him—heard the voices of his fellow-men—felt on his face, without shrinking, the full stress of the mid-day sun, whose rays he should never see again. But how about the darkness of the night, that he had learned to know only by the loneliness and the silence ? In its solitude was it not now and again almost his resolve to die, and not await another day ? Almost, yes !—but never quite. Always a decision to hear just once again the voice of his little lass in the morning. If it were only this once, and he should fail in strength to bear that other day ; still, let it be, for now ! Just once again !

But the longest nights led each to its dawn, and poor Jim knew of each dawn by hearsay, and started off early, on all days weather forbade not too grossly, hold of Lizarann's 'and, and takin' good care not to crost only when other parties done the same, actual-like, so you might place reliance, and not get under the 'orses' 'oofs ; and throughout each day that followed Jim treasured the anticipation of its end, and looked forward to the coming of his little lass to take him home. He would sit and think of what her small hand would feel like in his when the welcome hour should come for his departure ; and each day, as that hour came, and he found his way back to Vatted Rum Corner to wait for her, came also a short spell of tense anxiety lest he should not hear her voice this time. And then the relief, when he caught the signal he had taught her, through the noise of the traffic and the railway-whistles near at hand.

“ Ye shouldn't sing out *Poylot*, little lass,” said he, when she turned up at the end of that day—the day of the two



young men and the sixpence. "Ye should say Pie-lott. Else ye might be anyone else's little lass, not Father Jim's."

"I *ain't*," said Lizarann resolutely. "I'm Father Jim's. Pi-lot!" She threw her soul into a reproduction of her father's articulation.

"Nor yet you've no need to lose your front teeth over it. Easy does it in the end. Now again! Pi-lot!" Whereupon Lizarann repeated the word with self-restraint, and received approval. "Not for to tear up the paving-stones, lassie," added her father, explanatorily.

"What was that young varmint a-saying?" he asked, as they started to return home. He was referring to words overheard—winged words that had passed between his daughter and a boy. It was the same boy that had called him Pretty Poll, who had followed him to the street-corner; and had then gone on to greet Lizarann with the report that her Daddy was waiting to give her "what-for," for being late—which she wasn't.

Probably he was the worst boy in existence—at least. Lizarann thought he was. She was too young to appreciate his only virtue, a total absence of hypocrisy.

"Saying as it was *your* eyes as was out, and it didn't hurt *him*." Jim seemed mightily amused.

"What did you say to him over that, little lass?" said he.

"Didnt say nuffint!" And, indeed, Lizarann had not seen her way to quarrelling with two such obvious truths.

"What else was he a-saying? He said a bit more than that. I could hear him giving it mouth."

"Sayin' he'd four nuts he hadn't ate, and me to guess which 'and they was in beyont his back for a a'peny." Lizarann then explained the proposed deal at some length.

"He's a nice young sportin' charackter! Thimble-rigging isn't in it. Why, lassie, if you *had* guessed right, he'd just have swopped 'em across, and took your ha'penny. He wants attendin' to with a rope's end, he does—wants his trousers spilin'. His mother she sells the fried eels and winkles, next door against the little shop where I"—Jim hesitated a minute—"where I get my shaving-soap." For Jim remembered in time that his connection with this

shop was not to come to his child's ears. His board was to be kept in the background.

Lizarann wanted badly to frame a question about this boy. Were all boys nefarious whose mothers sold fried eels and winkles? And if so, had this one acquired a low moral tone by contact with fried fish, or had his parent's humble walk in life resulted from his depravity? Lizarann gave up the idea of asking this question. It was too complex. But she could get information about the barber's shop. She approached the subject indirectly

"Bridgetticks she can read what's wrote up on shaving-shops."

"What can she read on 'em, little lass?"

"She can read Easy Shaving Twopence. And Hegg-Shampoo Fourpence. And Fresh Water Every Customer. Round in the winder in Cazenove Street."

"Brayvo, Bridgetticks! But my little lass she's going to read ever so well as Bridgetticks—ah! and a fat lot better. And larn manners belike, as well!"

"Bridgetticks said she'd larn Simpson's boy manners. Down the yard where there's a dog killed his sister's cat." Lizarann spoke evidently with some idea of joining the class. But her father had other views.

"Bridgetticks indeed! She couldn't teach manners to a biled owl, to speak of. She better give her time to studying of 'em herself. Whatever was the name she called the gentleman, lass? Tell us again."

"The long gentleman?"

"Ah!"

"She didn't call him nuffint."

"Well, then—the short gentleman."

"A Cure."

"Well!—that wasn't manners, lassie. She had ought to have called him Sir—or his name, for that matter, if she'd come by it. Couldn't she say his name with Mister? In course she could, only she didn't know it."

Lizarann stopped, and stood nodding on the pavement. "Bridgetticks, she knowed his name—the short one," she said. "Because the tall gentleman, he called it him." Then the two went on again, Jim having reclaimed the hand he had let go for a moment to confirm a strange quick per-



ception of the child's emphatic nods by touching her head.

"What was the name of the short one the tall gentleman called him by?" he asked. This was not merely to make conversation. Jim had fancied he caught a familiar sound in the name one of his young swells of the morning had applied to the other. He had not heard their reference to Tallack Street. Had he done so, he would at once have identified them as the subjects of a narrative of Lizarann's some days since. She now offered an imperfect version of the name, and Jim at once caught the connection. He *had* heard the name Scipio—used by the young man when he gave him his sixpence for a box of Vesuvians.

"Sippy-oh—was that it?" said he. "Well, that's a queer start too. I've seen your two gentlemen, little lass, only this morning. One of 'em, he planked down a tanner for one box. Not Sippy-oh—t'other young master. What were the two of 'em doing again down in Tallack Street?"

Lizarann braced herself for her narrative by drawing a long breath and standing with her eyes very wide open, then plunged *in medias res* with an oppressive sense of responsibility for historical truth, but without punctuation. She pooled all her stops, however, and by throwing in a handful at long intervals gave her lungs an opportunity of expanding.

"They was two gentleman in one hansom and I seen 'em through the open winder and Aunt Stingy she shet the winder and Bridgetticks she come lookin' in at the winder and Aunt Stingy she says I'll flat your nose for you she says an impident little hussy and she goes out for to catch hold on her and Bridgetticks she sings out Old Mother Cobblers-wax and hooks it off. . . ." All the consolidated overdue stops came in here.

Jim put in a word to steady the narrative, derived from its earlier recital: "And then you got round behind your aunt, and the gentlemen were talking to the cab-driver, hey, lassie?"

Lizarann nodded at her father exactly as if he could have seen her. However, the way she said "yass" did all the work of her nod, as well as its own, and she continued with a new lease of breath: "The driver he says 'Don't see no



spremises ' he says, and the gentlemen they says ' Don't see no spremises ' they says, and then—' Ho here's a little girl ' they says all at wunst. . . ."

" And that was my little lass, warn't it, lassie ? And she showed 'em where the board was up. That was the way of it, I lay. And whereabout was Bridgetticks the whilst ?" Lizarann was becoming more reposeful in style, and was working round to a proper distribution of stops.

" Bridgetticks," she replied, " was in behind the palin's at 'Acker's, and was for biting Aunt Stingy if she laid 'ands. And Jimmy 'Acker's granny she come out, and ' Leave the child alone ' she says. But the two gentleman come down out of the hansom scab and said there was no spremises, but I was a nice little girl and should have a threp'ny bit. Yass !"

" And then your aunt she looked round after you, I'll go bail. Wasn't *she* in it, little lass ?"

" Then Aunt Stingy she giv' over, 'cos of Jimmy 'Acker's granny, and come to see. And the tall gentleman, he needn't trouble her, he says, and she kep' a little way off. And I kep' the threp'ny bit in my mouf, I did."

" So she mightn't get it ?" Lizarann nodded. " And where was Bridgetticks ?"

" Over acrost, feelin' up like, 'cos of Aunt Stingy."

An image passes through Jim's mind of a powerful rodent working stealthily round, clear of its enemy, to join the colloquy, and perhaps secure another threepence. His image of Bridgetticks is not a pleasing one. He doesn't believe in her sex or her girlhood—classes her with the fiendish boy at the fish-shop, and rather wishes he could let her loose on him to run him down, as one slips a dog from a leash. She would do it.

" And how came she to cut in ? It was my little lassie's cake."

But Lizarann felt hurt on her friend's account. " She giv' me two apples," she said, and left the point, as one sure to be understood. Then she continued : " The gentlemen wanted for to know our names, and Bridgetticks said not if took down. So the gentleman put the pencil away and she says Bridgetticks and I says Lizarann Tooplant."

“Right you were! And then what did the gentleman say?”

“Not to shout both at once.”

“Which did ye like best, little lass—which gentleman?” But the child is uncertain on this point. Being pressed, she admits a *tendresse* for the one called Scipio; but it appears that Bridgetticks has condemned him on account of his jaw, pointing to a certain sententiousness of style, which has already been in evidence in this story. Her discrimination of him as a Cure, too, will show those who are familiar with the use of this term that she placed a low value on his reflections.

Her father, having certainly spoken with these two gentlemen, felt some curiosity about what they could want in Tallack Street. His having spoken with them himself had, of course, given them an interest for him he had not felt before. But inquiry of a child not seven years old has to be conducted cautiously. If too hard pushed, she will invent. “What did ye make out they came for, lassie?” he asked.

“Spremisses,” was the reply, given with confidence. But this seemed ill-grounded when she added, “What does spremisses mean, daddy?”

“Houses with bills in the winder, lass. Sure! But didn’t they never say where they come from, nor what they wanted?”

“Bridgetticks she knew.”

“Where did she say they came from?”

“Smallporks Hospital.” Jim wondered how on earth Lizarann’s friend had struck on this vein of invention, but he only expressed the mildest doubt of its accuracy lest he should upset his informant. As it was, he disturbed her slightly. “She ain’t tellin’ no lies,” she added.

“P’raps it warn’t so bad as all that come to, lassie. P’rap’s it was only Guy’s or ’Tholomoo’s?” But the little person was not prepared to accept any composition that threw doubt on Bridgetticks. She might have questioned her statements personally, even to the extent of calling her a story. But she felt bound to defend her, even against her father. So she nailed her colours, so to speak, to the Smallpox Hospital. That was to be the very hospital, and



no other, that these two gentlemen were connected with. She gave illustrations of untruthfulness, as shown by contemporaries.

"Jimmy 'Acker he's a liar. And Uncle Steptoe he's a liar. Aunt Stingy says so. Bridgetticks she ain't. She speaks the troof, she does. Yass! She *says* so." Very open eyes and a nod.

"In coorse she does, and in coorse she knows." Then poor Jim wondered to himself what this young person was like that his little lass had such faith in. He continued: "What's she like to look at, by way of describing of her now?"

Lizarann had never described anybody, so far. That is to say, not consciously. She might have done it without knowing it was description. But she knew quite well what her father meant, and braced herself up to authorship.

"She's very 'ard, all over," she said, as a first item. "And she's awful strong. She is—yaas! And she don't stick out nowhere neither." A form the reverse of *svelte* is impressed upon her hearer's inner vision. But she repents of the last item, and adds, "Only her nose!"

"What's her colour of hair—black colour?—yaller colour?"

"T'int no colour at all, daddy."

"Just plain hair-colour—is that it?"

"Yass! Pline hair-colour."

"What's her eyes?" But this is too difficult. Lizarann gives it up. To say plain eye-colour would be poor and unoriginal. However, particulars could be given of Bridgettickses eyes, apart from questions of their colour.

"She can squint, she can. Yass—acrost!"

"She don't want to it—not she!"

"Don't she want to it, Daddy?" A timid expression of doubt this. "I said—I said—to Bridgetticks. . . ."

"Hurry up, little lass! What was it ye said?"

"I said—to Bridgetticks—I said the boys said she couldn't be off of it, they did. That's what the boys said."

"And she said *they* was liars, I'll go bail. Hay, little lass?"

"She said they was liars. Yass!" And then the difficulties of negotiating the passage across Cazenove Street,



where they had by this time arrived, stopped the conversation.

When the couple were safely landed on the opposite pavement, talk went on again. Jim's image of Bridgetticks had not been improved by Lizarann's description. And an incident of her narrative had caused him to picture to himself a terrifying vision of her.

"She must have looked a queer un, lassie, flattening her nose against the winder-pane."

"Aunt Stingy said she'd welt her down fine if she could once catch holt."

"Your aunt don't seem to have thought her a beauty. Not with her nose against the glass! What did you think yourself, lassie?"

"I didn't seen her." Her head shook a long continuous negative.

"How do ye make that out, lass?"

"We ply at bein' oarposite sides of the winder-pine. Her outside—me in!"

"Well, then—o' course you *saw* her, lassie. You've got eyes in your head."

"I was a-flotting of my own nose against the glast, inside, too clost to see. Right oarposite—yass!" And then explained, at some expense of words, that this gyme, or game, was played by two little girls, or little boys, or a sample of each, jamming their noses one against the other, as it were, with the cold, unpleasant glass between. The gratification of doing this, whatever it was, might be enhanced and intensified by a similar treatment of their tongue-tips. This last variation caused Lizarann to end up with: "Outside tistés of rine. Inside tistés of cleanin' windows."

"I don't see no kissin' to be got out of that," said Jim. But the inventors of this game had evidently never anticipated its adoption by grown-up persons, and did not advise it. *Their* low natures could not enter into it. It was, however, made clear why Bridgetticks was invisible during an innings—if the term is permissible.

But oh, to think of it! Poor Jim had never seen his little lass, whose chatter had supplied him with a vivid

image—albeit, perhaps, a false one—of her friend of ten years old. Her voice and touch were all he had to live for; but the only image of her he could get was from a grudging admission of his sister's that she might grow to be like her mother in time, but she would never have her looks. These looks were only admitted by Mrs. Steptoe for strategic purposes—videlicet, the cheapening of her brother's one possession and emphasizing of his losses. She may have had no defined intention of giving him pain, but the attitude of thought implied formed part of a scheme of Jeremiads her life was devoted to fostering and maturing. The looks of Lizarann's mother were the only pivot on which discussion of the child's own could turn naturally and easily. The embittered and unsympathetic disposition of her aunt made communication about them on other lines difficult or impossible to poor Jim.

But he treasured in his heart the idea that one day he would meet with some congenial soul whom he could take into his confidence, and petition for a description of what his little lass was really like. Unless, indeed, when she grew older, she was able to tell him what her image in a mirror resembled better than she had done when once or twice he had tried that way of eliciting information. For on those occasions Lizarann had at first shown symptoms of becoming what her aunt called a little giggling, affected chit, and had only been able to report that she looked "like Loyzarann in the glast," and then had grown uneasy, betrayed a tendency towards panic, and hid her face on her father when he became earnest, and begged her for his sake to tell him what she really looked like. She couldn't understand it at all, and may have had misgivings that she was being entrapped into some sort of ritual of a Masonic nature. So Jim had to wait for enlightenment from herself, and looked forward to the day when she should become more old and serious. Meanwhile what would he not have given for one little glimmer to help his imperfect image of what his little lass was like, now—now that her childhood was there?

But the darkness was upon him for all time. And the world that once was his to see had vanished—vanished with the last image his eyes had known: the quay at Cape-

town in the blazing sun, the Dutch-built houses on the hot hill-side, and Table Mountain dark against the sky ; and all the wide sea, a blaze of white beneath the blue, whose strongest glare might never reach his cancelled sight again. And there—so Jim believed, on the strength of a legend his informant may have invented on the spot—when the winds were at their worst round the Cape of Storms, might still be seen the source of all his evil, the Phantom Ship that had blasted his eyesight and made him what he had become. So fixed was this article of Jim's faith that it is no exaggeration to say that he drew comfort from the unending doom of her shadowy crew. Come what might to him, he always had this consolation, that as long as the sea should last, there was no hope of rest for the soul of the Flying Dutchman. It was something, if it wasn't much ; and he told and retold the tale to his little lass, who was grieved on his behalf ; but had somewhere, in the un-revengeful background of her mind, a chance thought of pity now and again for the unhappy seaman who was the cause of his misfortune.



### CHAPTER III

THE lady who had shown an interest in Lizarann at the Dale Road Schools was the wife of Sir Murgatroyd Arkroyd, of Royd in Rankshire and Drum in Banffshire, and even more places. The young man who had bought Jim's matches and returned his change was their eldest son, William Rufus Arkroyd. His friend, whom he called Scipio, who was his college chum at Cambridge a year or so since, and had remained his inseparable companion, was on this particular day starting with him to pay an autumn visit to his paternal mansion, Royd Hall, about seven miles from Grime, where the new Translucent Cast Steel Foundries are.

The two young men got a carriage to themselves, and played picquet all the way to Furnivals, the little station where you get out for Royd and Thaness Castle, and the omnibus meets you. Because you are the sort probably that omnibuses meet. And it may be considered to have met William Rufus and Scipio on this occasion, but only platonically; for they rode to the house in a dogcart that awaited them. However, the omnibus had the consolation of being ridden in by Mr. Arkroyd's man Schott, who came on in it with such luggage as would not go under a seat amenable only to card-cases or the like.

The model groom, Bullett, who had driven the trap to the station, had just time to establish himself on the back-seat, when the model mare was off at a spin, and an agricultural population, whose convictions and diet had changed very little since the days of William the Norman, were abasing themselves in a humiliating manner unworthy of the age we live in—uncovering male heads and bobbing female skirts—at the doors of cottages whose hygienic arrangements were a disgrace to a Christian country and a reflection on civilisation. So said the *Grime Sentinel*, in an editorial; and, as it spoke as though the editor had tried

all these arrangements and found them wanting, no doubt it was right.

“Now, what have you and my affectionate brother been talking about all the way here?” Thus Judith, the sister of the one she is not addressing.

Scipio replies at leisure. He is evidently accustomed to being patronised by this handsome and self-possessed young lady, who is two years his senior, and speaks as to a junior. But, though she patronises him, she waits until he chooses to answer.

“Your affectionate brother and myself, Miss Arkroyd, are so accustomed to each other’s society, after a long residence in college together, that it is only on rare and special occasions that we exchange any remarks at all. We agreed some time since that the edge of conversation—that, I believe, was the expression—was taken off when each of the parties to it is always definitely certain what the other is going to say.”

“Nonsense!—ridiculous boy! Do you expect me to believe that you two rode all that way and never spoke?”

Scipio reconsiders, and takes exception to his own speech, with the air of a person drawing on a reserve of veracity, a higher candour: “Perhaps I have overstated the case. We played picquet all the way from Euston. Picquet, as you are aware, involves an occasional interchange of monosyllables. . . .”

“I know. One for his heels and two for his nob. Go on.”

“Excuse me. Allow me to correct a misapprehension. The expressions you have quoted belong to another game—cribbage.”

“Does it matter? Do go on with what you were saying . . . ‘involves an occasional interchange of monosyllables’ . . .” The young lady is a little impatient, and taps.

“Which can scarcely be regarded as conversation.” He completes the sentence with deliberation. He seems to take a pleasure in doing so, simply because of her impatience. “But with the exception of allusions to the game, I can recall no remark or observation whatever, wise or otherwise.”



Whereupon the young lady, seeming to give him up as hopeless, calls to her brother in an adjoining room : " Will ! " and he replies : " What ? Anything wanted ? "

" Yes !—come and make Lord Felixthorpe reasonable." From which it is clear that Scipio is a lord, or has a right to be called one. He is somebody's son, supposably.

This conversation is taking place in the drawing-room at Royd, where the two young men arrived just in time to delay dinner half-an-hour, that they might have time to dress. At Royd, undue hurry about anything was unknown, and Mr. Schott had arranged young Mr. Arkroyd's shirt-studs in his shirt, black silk stockings, coat, waistcoat, and trousers in a most beautiful pattern on his bed, almost before his apologies to his mother were over for giving the wrong time of his train. He ought to have arrived an hour sooner, and Bullett and the dogcart—or, rather, its mare—had been kicking their heels all that time at Furnival Station, enjoying the great luxury of enforced idleness, with a grievance against its cause. However, it was all right by now, and everyone who had not eaten too many macaroons at tea had dined extremely well.

" Smoke a cigarette," said William Rufus to his sister, as he settled down on the split fauteuil. " Never mind Sibyl ! " She disclaimed Sibyl's influence, and lighted the cigarette he gave her at his own. He continued : " I can't make Scip reasonable. Nobody can."

" He says you and he never exchanged a word, and that you played cribbage in the train all the way without speaking."

" It was picquet. I don't know cribbage."

" Oh dear !—how trying you boys are ! As if that mattered ! The *point* is, did you speak, or didn't you ? "

Whereupon each of the young men looked at the other, and said : " Did we speak, or didn't we ? "

" I can wait," said the young lady ; and waited with a passiveness that had all the force of activity.

" I understand "—thus Scipio, more deliberately than ever—" that technical remarks relating to the game are excluded by hypothesis."

" Yes ! " from the catechist.

“Stop a bit, Scip. We did speak. We spoke about the blind beggar.”

“I knew you were talking nonsense. You talked all the way. But who was the blind beggar?”

“A friend of Scip’s—at least, a father of one of his young ladies.”

Miss Arkroyd looked amused more than curious. “You haven’t told us of this one,” said she. “Or have you?”

“I have had nothing official to communicate, so far. Possibly a mere passing *tendresse*. I have only known the young lady a very short time. I will promise further information as soon as there is anything to communicate.”

Miss Arkroyd continued to look at the speaker as though to find out his real meaning, half in doubt, half taking him *au sérieux*. But her brother struck in, saying: “Nothing interesting, Judith. This one’s too young, and might be unsuitable from other points of view—eh, Scip?”

“The family connection,” Scipio answers reflectively, “may have drawbacks. Nevertheless, I find, when I indulge in the position, hypothetically, of a son-in-law, that I do not shrink from the image of the relation I have created. It has a sort of sense about it of the starboard watch, and keeping a good look-out on foc’sles, and knowing how to splice cables. By-the-by, Will, this is an accomplishment that might prove useful in my family—splicing cables, I mean. I am certain that we can’t, at present, any of us. Even my half-brother, though his grandfather—on his mother’s side—is an Admiral, cannot splice a cable . . .”

“Never mind the cables! Go on about the blind beggar.”

Her brother, as one who knows his friend’s disposition to wander, supplies consecutive narrative: “The blind beggar’s that sailor at the railway. Most likely you’ve seen him. . . . No?”—replying to a disclaiming headshake.—“Well!—take him for granted. The child’s his child.”

“What child?”

“You’ve seen her yourself, I think; or the same thing—the *madre* has. You remember?—in that Tallack Street place, on the Remunerative Artisans’ Domicile Company’s estate. You told us of it yourself, you know.”



"I know Tallack Street perfectly well. It's the place where there was land for a factory that I thought would do for the New Idea. Have you seen it?"

"Why, of course! Scip and I went over next day. Well—it's that little girl." But Judith has slummed so many little girls in Tallack Street, all alike, that she can't recall any special one. She remembers the front teeth of one very plainly. Her brother also remembers Bridget-ticks—not a young lady easily forgotten, clearly. But he has forgotten her name.

"Yes, I know her. So does Scip. She called him a Cure. But not that one—a younger child. I rather think our mother knows something about her." He leans his head well back towards his mother in the next room—sees its ceiling, perhaps, as he blows his cigarette-smoke straight upwards—and calls to her, "Madre!" The Italian word may be some mere family habit, without reason. A perceptive guest in the next room makes a mental note of it as a useful point in his next novel. For he is a literary celebrity. Lady Arkroyd answers: "Yes, dear; what?" She looks quite round the high back of the chair she sits in, and speaks fairly towards her son. He continues to throw his voice back over his head to her:

"What was the name of the queer kid that said her father was 'an Asker'? You told us about her, you know.... At the school place, down by Tallack Street...."

"I know. Her father's blind, and she leads him about. Be quiet, and don't ask, and perhaps I shall remember the name." Lady Arkroyd shuts her eyes over the job and waits on Memory. It may take time. Her son decides that he can listen just as well with his head down, and becomes normal. Presently his mother reports: "I think it was Steptoe—no!—not Steptoe. Eliza Ann Copeland. Adeline Fossett's schoolroom." If you look back to where Lizarann made this lady's acquaintance, you will see that there was underlying method in the seeming-disjointed action of her memory.

Her son replies, "Yes—that child"; and adds, "All right—that'll do," meaning that he has now got all the information wanted for the moment. So the perceptive

guest infers, and listens with interest for the use he is going to make of it. But he loses the thread of the conversation; for, just as he is going to speak, the sister says to Scipio, "What did you say 'er' for?"—meaning, why did you begin and stop?

"The expression," his lordship replies with intense deliberation, "was an involuntary prefix to a statement I was preparing to make concerning the patronymic of the little girl who——" He stops dead on the pronoun, without finishing the sentence; then continues: "I need go no farther, especially as I foresee a fresh confirmation forming on the lips of my dear friend William Rufus of the view taken of my personal character by the other little-girl-who. But perhaps the name of the first little-girl-who may be taken as decided on. In that case I need not adduce my evidence."

"Do shut up, Scip," is the comment of William Rufus. "The other little girl spoke the truth. You *are* a Cure—not the least doubt of it."

"What *is* a Cure?" says Judith. "I don't know. But please don't shut up: never mind Will! What was it you were going to say?"

"Merely this:—When your intractable brother and myself visited Tallack Street, having previously interviewed Mr. Illingworth, the courteous secretary of the Remunerative . . ."

"Do get along, Scip!" from Mr. Arkroyd

"My dear Will, I assure you that your impatience only defeats its own object. If you will balance the time gained by skipping passages in my statement—which may in the end prove essential to the context—against the time lost in administering verbal stimulus to the speaker, you will find—if I am not mistaken—that the latter exceeds the former."

"All right, old chap! I give up. Go ahead!"

"I shall have to go and talk to the new visitors. You had better get on." These speeches come simultaneously from his two hearers; the last speaker with her fine eyes fixed on a wrist-watch, little larger than the iris of either. Scipio accelerates with docility.

"After getting the particulars of the land and buildings from Illingworth, we drove round by Tallack Street to



look at the site. We always make a point of seeing everything. Illingworth was not justified in saying that a small shed on the land, in the last stages of disintegration, could be utilised for a motor-garage . . . but never mind that ! We are at present concerned with the name of the little-girl-who. The plummy little dark-eyed one, Will—not that shrill little fiend. Well !—when we arrived at Tallack Street, and could see nothing the least resembling a suitable site for a factory—or, indeed, anything else—your accomplished brother, Miss Arkroyd, who cannot get in or out of a hansom without breaking his knee-caps, urged upon me the propriety of descending and inquiring at the Robin Hood. The Robin Hood was congenial to me—the sort of pub I always frequent when I have a choice. It had a picture of Robin dressed like a member of what I always suppose to be a benefit-club, which extends to me, when I sit at windows, a long pole with a collection-box, suggesting an inversion of the way we fed bears in our youth. . . .” His hearers become restive.

“This is irrelevant,” says the brother. And the sister looked again at her wrist.

“I am aware of it. I will not detain Miss Arkroyd long at the Robin Hood. I will merely note the fact that it had a water-trough for horses, and a space in front—it is in the main road, just as you reach Tallack Street—and that it is a House of Call for Plasterers. I mention this in case . . .”

“In case any of us should plaster unexpectedly ? Do you feel that you wish to plaster, Will ?”

“I might. Sibyl probably will, sooner or later. Go on, Scip. . . . Yes, we interrupted you—admitted ! . . . Now go on.”

“In the private bar of the Robin Hood—for it boasts a public and private bar, though it stops short of making parade of a saloon bar—I encountered a cobbler drinking a tumblerful of spirits. He was becoming a cobblerful of tumblerfuls. . . .”

“I’m sure I know that man,” Judith says, in brackets. “It was the one that said he was ‘mine very truly, Robert Steptoe.’ Never mind !—go on. . . .”

“But he was not too drunk to tell me that if I kept my

eyes open I should see a blooming board at the end of the street. There wasn't any too much reading on it now, the boys having aimed at it successfully ever since he came to Rose Cottage—'ouse on the right—but he took it a board was always a board, reading or no. I could see for myself, by looking. It warn't trespassers ; he knew that. . . . Do not be impatient. I am coming to the gist of my communication. . . . Shortly after leaving the bar of the Robin Hood, I heard some boys singing a monotonous chant. A name was frequently repeated in it ; it sounded like :

‘ Lizarann Coupland’s  
 Father begs for ‘apence  
 Just round the corner  
 Down by the gasworks. . . .’

And so on over and over again. I inquired of one small boy *whose* father it was that begged for halfpence, but he turned the conversation, and suggested that I should give him a farden kike. However, another one repeated the name gratis ; and though he was too young to be quite intelligible, I was satisfied that the name was Eliza Ann Copeland or Coupland.”

“ Why couldn't you tell us that straight off, Lord Felixthorpe ?” says Judith. To which the narrator replies with a sweet smile, “ My inherent prolixity, no doubt.” She says absently to the wrist-watch, “ No doubt !” and then, looking up at the speaker, illogically asks, “ What was the rest of the story ? Go on.”

Her brother protests : “ Come, Judith, be reasonable ! You're just like the people that author-chap has been telling us about downstairs . . . people who complain that his books are too long, and then ask for more. He says he's badgered for sequels, and untold gold wouldn't induce him to bring an old character into a new book.”

“ He's perfectly right. Anyhow, I am sure he always finishes a story when he begins it. I want the rest of what happened. Only I want this one cut short—not too prosy, please ! Did you give that little boy the farthing cake ?”

“ I gave him a halfpenny. He ignored my application for change, and walked away hand-in-hand with his friend towards a shop. I accompanied the cab on foot to the



end of Tallack Street, where we found the blooming board, and decided on its illegible character. But there was no doubt the piece of land was the one Illingworth had shown us on the map. The fictitious motor-garage was a place that could only have been a source of danger to rash intruders. We exclaimed together that there *were* no premises, and the cabman endorsed our opinion. At this juncture an exacerbad female rushed from a doorway to intercept and chastise, if possible, a little girl about ten years old, who had been peering at her through a window on the ground-floor. This little girl slipped through an impassable orifice and got away, shouting derision, but pursued by the woman. . . .”

“Who was more than half afraid of her.” Thus Mr. Arkroyd parenthetically.

“I agree with you. However, she left her door open, and the little girl, whom I think we may consider to be identified as Eliza **Ann** Coupland, came out timidly, and sucked a corner of her neck-handkerchief in our immediate neighbourhood. She seemed to regard the clash between the other little girl and her mother as normal, and appeared to court conversation with us. . . .”

“It’s not her mother. It’s her aunt. *I* know the people.” The interruption is Judith’s. “But go on.”

“Her aunt. Our conversation with her was handicapped by her shyness; also by her objection to removing the handkerchief from her mouth. But she appeared to be attracted to us by a kind of fascination, showing itself in a fixed gaze in a direction contrary to the pull of the handkerchief. Her aunt’s injunction to her to put it out of her mouth and answer the gentleman led the gentleman to prevail on the aunt to withdraw. We then understood her to refer us to a friend, Bridget Hicks, for local information. . . .”

“Exactly. And Bridget Hicks called you a Cure.”

“That is so. With what justice I am not in a position to say, without a more exact acquaintance with the meaning of the term. Bridget Hicks was the little girl who had fled before the wrath of the aunt. She joined her friend on witnessing the discomfiture of that lady by the tactics of your accomplished brother, who, I think, impressed her as Royalty.”

“Very well, then!—it comes to this.” It is Judith who is reporting progress. “The last time you spoke in the train was about a blind beggar whose little girl walks him about, and lives in that abominable slum papa has allowed to be built on the Cazenove estate, where I sent you because there was a board with something about vacant premises suitable for a factory on it. Why couldn’t you say so at once?”

“May I be pardoned for suggesting,” Scipio replies with a reinforcement of his sententious manner, which had lapsed slightly, “that, had I done so, a lengthy cross-examination would have been necessary to put my hearers in possession of details I have been able to supply.”

His friend seems to think there is something in this. “Just consider, Judith,” he says. “If Scip had cut himself down, as you suggest, you would have known nothing about Eliza Ann’s neck-handkerchief. I consider that it speaks volumes.”

“Scip, as you call him, could have thrown it in.”

And Miss Arkroyd, who is more tall, impressive, and handsome than her mother, collects herself, which spreads over a great deal of fauteuil, to join the party in the other room. Her brother and his friend follow her.

The house-party in the room adjoining—that is, the large drawing-room with the Tintoret; perhaps you have been at Royd, and know it?—had been making a good deal of noise, considering the connection. One mustn’t laugh too loud, if it’s to be high-tension sweetness and light. This thought passed through the mind of Mr. Alfred Challis, better known to the world as “Titus Scroop,” the great Author, who was one of the party; it was to him we referred as the perceptive guest. But he could not blame himself for causing any of the too-loud laughs; because, whenever he thought of a good thing, instead of speaking it out as he used to do when he was an Accountant, he kept it to himself and made a mental note of it for copy. But when he was clear in his mind that a thing was not good enough for copy, he revealed it; and then the company laughed gently and obligingly, because he was a great Author. He felt sorry usually.

Mrs. Challis wasn’t there. Mr. Challis used to visit at



distinguished houses alone. But there was nothing against her. Discussion of whether she couldn't be asked this time always admitted that. But it invariably ended in a decision that Mrs. Challis was an Impossible Person—although Mrs. Candour had made every inquiry, and there was nothing whatever against her. “Still,” said Lady Arkroyd to the Duchess of Rankshire, “even if there had been! . . .” And her Grace, predisposed to forgiveness of antecedents by native good-nature and a flawless record, saw regretfully that even then the lady would have been welcome, if only she had been Possible. Not being so, and being also, report said, huffy, she had never come to pass in polite society. Her husband believed he believed she was just as happy at home, because a working hypothesis of life was *de rigueur*. She had certainly been almost rude to Lady Arkroyd on the occasion of a conciliatory visit; misunderstanding may have helped, but one thing is certain—she either was not asked to Royd this time or refused the invitation.

As to other folks, there were several. Only it was not easy to say which was which; it often isn't when there are several. They have to be left alone to assume identities, and a certain percentage succeeds. The balance dies away. And then one of them afterwards writes a daring story, or ventilates a startling theory, or commits an interesting murder. And there he was, all that time, at the Simpkins's garden-party, and you never knew! Were *you* also—you yourself—a nonentity some of the others were thinking of as a Person-at-a-Party, *et præterea nihil*? And is one of them now thinking to *himself*—dear him!—was that little, snuffy, unobtrusive chap really the author of this remarkable work, which appeals to the better side of my nature, and has scarcely a dull passage from beginning to end? Meaning, of course—*you*! And just to think!—he lost his chance, and may never get another. How sorry you feel for him!

These reflections are really in the story, because they were passing through the mind of Mr. Challis while a lady who had been asked to sing Carpathian Ballads was making up her mind which she would sing. In these philosophizings of his—especially the last one—may be detected the

disagreeable sneering tone you never would have suspected him of. You would have thought him an easy-going chap—no more. It was there, though, and it affected his mind more or less all through the Carpathian Ballads. Whenever he was thrown on his own resources for a few minutes, the disagreeable sneering tone was apt to be audible to himself in his communings with his innermost soul. On this occasion, his innermost soul, being left alone with him for a short time, took occasion to decide that his host was a pompous old Ass. All these heavy landed proprietors were pompous Asses, more or less. The Woman—thus it referred to the lady of the house—was more interesting, of course. Women were. But she was a worldling, and a Philistine at heart, for all this pretence of worshipping Art and Letters and Song. As for the son, he gave himself airs ; but it, the soul, wouldn't say anything against him, because his cigars were undeniable. And the soul shared its owner's—if, indeed, he could call his soul his own!—appreciation of good 'baccy. The young Lord, it decided, was not a bad sample of his depraved class—would find his level in Parliament, and be Under-Secretary of something, sometime. But he would have to learn to shout louder and speak faster. As for the two young women, the soul's owner had really only just distinguished one from the other. As for the music, the singer couldn't sing ballads, whatever else she could sing. *She* was nothing much to look at ; but the eldest daughter had a fine throat and shoulders. Only nowadays you never could tell how much was real. As for the others, he hadn't made them out yet. Lady Arkroyd had been civil to him at dinner, certainly. But then she had invited him. He had a vague sense that he was regarded as her property, and that the others all shirked responsibility on his account, and that he was, in fact, to them an outsider. Anyway, it was bad form of the son and his friend, and the pair of shoulders, to go away and talk in the back room, and take no notice of—well!—of himself, for instance. At which point his innermost soul turned traitor—rounded on him, and accused him of allowing his disagreeable sneering tone to get the better of him—of giving way to ill-temper, in fact.

Perhaps these presents will be read by someone who has



had a similar experience as a new-comer in a great house. He or she may also have found out that there is honey as well as wormwood, frankincense as well as assafoetida, to be met with in such a position, even as did Mr. Alfred Challis, the eminent novelist.

For, the Carpathian ballads coming to an end, that gentleman found himself suddenly being apprised, by the owner of the shoulders, that she had been longing for a word—with so eminent a writer—all the evening. And there was a question she was dying to ask him. Only they would have plenty of time to talk about that to-morrow. When was his next book coming out? . . . not till the spring? . . . oh dear! And what was the title? . . . “Titus Scroop” always had such interesting titles. . . . What? Not decided on? The fine eyes that went with the shoulders seemed surprised at this. “No doubt,” said the Author, “the novel is as anxious as anyone to know what its title is going to be.” This wasn’t worth keeping for copy. The lady laughed the laugh that concedes that a joke has been made or meant, not the laugh of irresistible appreciation. What did that matter? Mr. Challis’s ill-humour was being charmed away. Probably some student of human nature has noticed that it is not very material that the flattery of a good-looking woman should be sincere, provided mankind gets enough of it. Mr. Challis suspected that he was being soothed, and “Titus Scroop” spoken of in inverted commas, as compensation for having been left to choose between the company of other males and no company at all. But still, he *was* being soothed. No more words about it! Mr. Challis acquitted the shoulders, and even the mass of rich black hair, of any assistance from Art; and when the party broke up for the night, went to his couch contented.

Having, as it were, obsessed this gentleman, in order to get a clear view of this autumn’s house-party at Royd, we may as well make further use of him, and peep over his shoulder as he writes his first letter to his impossible wife, in the cretonne bedroom at the end of the passage where the German Baroness saw the ghost—you know that story, of course? Oh dear, what a lot of candles one does light to write letters by in other people’s houses when one hasn’t got to pay for them!

This is what Mr. Challis is writing now : “ . . . I like the talky chap better than the son and heir. He’s a lord. They neither of them take to me, because I’m not ’Varsity. I came down in the train with them, only not the same carriage. I rode third, of course ; there were no seconds.” The writer felt that it was very clever of the thirds to be thirds at all when there were no seconds, but decided not to write it—as too subtle for the intellect of his impossible she—and wrote on : “ I saw them playing cards in a smoking-carriage, and recognised the son and heir by his portrait. It isn’t a bit like him. There’s a fat pink politician here, with little eyes, who talks thirty-two to the dozen. His name is Ramsey Tomes. He pinned my host as he was coming from the dinner-table, and detained him ever so long. We heard the rumble of his rounded periods afar ”—will she understand that ? thought the writer—“ long after everyone else had followed the womankind to the drawing-room. However, they came up in time for the music, and I heard Mr. Tomes assuring Sir Murgatroyd that his respect for that Bart was so intense that he would reconsider the whole of his political opinions forthwith, but without the slightest expectation of changing one jot or one tittle of them.” Here the writer abstained, consideratively, with his pen delayed over the inkstand, from inditing that he had never met with a “ tittle ” out of the company of its invariable jot. That would be too deep for this wife of his. He brought the pen slowly into the arena again. “ Sir Murgatroyd repeated the same sentiment in several different words. As for all the other people, I must tell about them gradually, or leave them till I come home. The younger daughter, Sibyl—that’s how to spell her name—not Sybil, remember—strikes me as a little waspish. Judith, the other, is a tall, handsome woman, with a figure expensive to dress, but a little *prepoten’e*.” He let this word stand, having written it, though he felt sure that the impossible one’s Italian would not cover it. He did not mind leaving her to choose a meaning for it ; it franked him of any responsibility. Then he thought he had written enough, and ended up : “ You need not be uneasy about my neuralgia. I feel better already, and shall have a hot bath first thing in the morning.—Your loving mate, A. C.” But he



added an amends for an omission—"Kiss the kids from me."

Then he betrayed further uneasiness of conscience by saying to himself: "After all, she's much better at home with the babies. She would never get on among these people." Whether it occurred to the good gentleman that he had it in his power to alter the position of the pieces on the board we do not know. If it did, the idea soon vanished behind a speculation whether the next guest after him would have a new acreage of clean sheet and pillow all to himself; and if not, what a lot of washing went for nothing! He almost wished he was a chimney-sweep, to make it valid.

## CHAPTER IV

It is bewildering to reflect on the number of avenues open to Society by which to approach its own final perfection. And disappointing, too, when a start has been made along some promising one, to come so soon to a parting of the ways, with never a sign-post—not so much as a stray uncrucified Messiah for a guide—as the night falls over the land. For even so, each last new Theory of Perfectibility, each panacea for the endemics that afflict us, seems to pass from the glory of its dawn to the chill hours of its doubt ; and its Apostles fall away and change their minds, and its subscribers discontinue their subscriptions, and it becomes out of date. And those who have not lain low, like Br'er Fox, but have committed themselves past all recall to its infallibility, are sorry because they cannot remind us that they said so all along, only they were never paid the slightest attention to.

It is possible that some such perceptions passed through Mr. Challis's reflective mind in the course of next day at Royd. He began to find out that he was in a sort of hornet's nest of Reformers, every one of them anxious to point out avenues of salvation for Society. For Sir Murgatroyd, who was the soul of liberality towards every doctrine, political, religious, or social, that he had no prejudice against, liked nothing better than to crowd his house full of reforming theorists. Was he not himself one, and the author of a pamphlet called "The Higher Socialism : An Essay towards a Better Understanding of the Feudal System"? He therefore welcomed with splendid hospitality every advocate of every doctrine that was undoubtedly new, only two conditions being complied with. One was that if it was a New Morality it should be possible to enter into its details without shocking—suppose we say—a hardened reader of Laurence Sterne ; and



the other that it should not countenance, palliate, advocate, encourage, support, or lend adhesion to his especial *bête noire*, the Americanisation of our Institutions. On this particular occasion a fine bag of neo-archs—how apologize for such a word?—had been secured by him during his summer holiday; and when Mr. Challis made his appearance at the breakfast-table next morning, he was button-holed away from its beautiful clean damask by a brace of Thinkers, each anxious to communicate his Thoughts, and, if possible, entangle the sympathies of a powerful pen “Titus Scroop” was known to possess.

It is annoying to be interrupted when you are making up your mind what you’ll have; and then you take poached eggs when you want filleted plaice, or *vice-versa*. Mr. Challis showed intrepidity, saying to a disciple of the learned German reformer Graubosch: “I make a point of never listening to anything worth hearing at breakfast.” It was a clever repulse; but committed him to capitulation to Graubosch later. He succeeded, but with a like reservation, in escaping from an advocate of a really formidable system of Assurance which would have widespread effects on Society, by saying—as though the first few words of its exponent had gone home to him—“You and I must talk that out over a game of billiards.” The fact is this gentleman had not been sufficiently congratulated about his last book, so far, by the ladies of the family; and he felt a strong bias towards being flattered by Miss Arkroyd particularly, although in his letter to his wife he had spoken with coldness—ostentatious, and he knew it—of this young lady’s fascinations. So he was already scheming in his heart to get her in a corner by herself, where she would be able to express her wonder at his insight into things no one else—except she and he, presumably—knew anything about. He was perceptibly conscious that the short interview between himself and this very good-looking young lady, the evening before, had lacked reference to his insight, and that recognition in that quarter would be pleasant.

It is a little difficult to saunter away from Thinkers who are convinced that you will be interested in their Thoughts, especially if you have given any of them the right to begin,

“Referring to what we were saying yesterday, etc.”; or, “I have been thinking over that apparent contradiction, etc.” But it can be done, with tact. Mr. Challis had not a perfectly clear record of avoidance of Philosophy : his buttonholers of the morning could have pleaded justifications. So he felt diplomatic as he got into another coat because the sun was quite hot in the garden, and then came down the other stairs, where he was sure to meet nobody, and so through the kitchen-gardens to the Inigo Jones orangery that was now an aviary. That was where Miss Arkroyd had said she was going—not to him, but to someone else in his hearing. So clearly so that it was almost as good as if he hadn’t heard, but had approached her by accident, when he came upon her out of a side-avenue of clipped hedges. By that time he was sauntering quite naturally, with a cigar in his mouth, just begun. This was as it should be.

“Have you seen my green parroquets?” said the lady.

“I haven’t noticed any. Are they loose in the garden?” As though they would have been! But Mr. Challis wasn’t in earnest.

“Not that I know of! Did you see any?” She had taken him quite seriously, and he had to explain.

“It was my ill-judged facetiousness” said he. “I meant I had been nowhere except in the garden.”

“Oh, I see! You quite frightened me. They are such nice little people. Come in and look at them.” But Mr. Challis felt that he would have to practise a certain discretion in his accustomed modes of speech, one of which was a perverse gravity over an obvious absurdity. But he had long given up expecting insight into this from Marianne, the impossible wife. Why should he, then, from this young woman, to whom he and his ways were quite a novelty? Besides, we had to consider the individualities of that strange creature, the human Toff. Mr. Challis reflected that absurd tropes and inversions, without a smile, are the breath of life to cab and bus men. Perhaps William the Norman never put his royal tongue in his cheek: it may have been contrary to the Feudal System.

The little parroquets didn’t wait for their proprietor and



this new gentleman to come into their palace. The moment they heard them they came with a wild rush into an outside cage. But, being out, they took no notice of their disturbers—none whatever! They conversed about them, clewed side by side on a long perch, with a stunning and unhesitating volubility that made the brain reel; a shrill, intolerable prestissimo of demisemiquavers on one note that pierced the drum of the ear like a rain of small steel shot. They had come to so exactly the same conclusion, so it seemed, as they all repeated it at once, first to right, then to left—had so precisely the same opinion about their visitors, that it was hardly necessary to dwell upon it so long, Mr. Challis thought.

“Are they sweet, or are they not?” was what his companion said.

Challis admitted the sweetness—or possible sweetness—of their dispositions. But he took exception to their voices. He would have preferred these to be more like Cordelia’s. The nice little people kept up such a fire of comment, although Miss Arkroyd was now supplying them with cherries, that Challis could hardly hear what she was saying. But he gathered that it was eulogy of the way in which he had referred to the voice of Cordelia and King Lear’s description of it, in one of his novels. Only it seemed to him that she was putting the saddle on the wrong horse—ascribing the passage to the wrong book, for she mentioned the “Spendthrift’s Legacy,” the first work that introduced him to his public. As is frequently the case, this book continued to be the one he was most connected with by non-readers of his works, for all that many more recent ones had had a much larger circulation.

“Are you sure it isn’t in ‘The Epidermis’?” he asked.

“What isn’t?”

“‘Gentle and low, an excellent thing in women’—or parrots—what you referred to just now. . . .”

“What’s ‘The Epidermis’? Who’s it by? I mean—I’ve seen it. But I didn’t know it was yours.” Whereat Mr. Challis felt crushed. Fancy anybody not knowing whom ‘The Epidermis’ was by! If it had only been not having read it yet, *that* could have been softened by confession of intense yearning to do so, unfairly frustrated by

anæmic Circulating Libraries. But not to know whom it was by !

“Name of my last book. Fidgetts and Thrills. Six Shillings net.” Mr. Challis affected a light joking tone. But he was mortified. However, Miss Arkroyd was under obligation to invent something of a palliative nature, and in the effort Cordelia’s voice lapsed.

“Oh yes-s-s-s !” said she, dwelling on the “s” to express a mind momentarily bewildered, but awaiting a light that was sure to come, if she made the hiss long enough, and then cutting sharply in with an interruption to it. “I was thinking of another book. *Quite* another !” And then closed the subject for good, but as one that might have been pursued had she been thinking of a book that was rather another, but not quite.

You see, the fact was that this young woman had read *none* of this author’s works, though it seemed she yearned to do so. She had had no time for reading, and the book had always got sent back to Mudie’s before she had read it, and so on. Well !—we can all sympathize, can’t we ? But, then, she shouldn’t have pretended she had, because that was fibs. At most she had read a quotation from one of his stories—she couldn’t say which—in a review.

Mr. Challis suspected all this, and was too much a man of the world to commit the blunder of proving that a lady had told fibs, however insignificant. He was rather glad the little green birds kept in such good voice, for though they usually dropped their cherries and wanted another, they never dropped their subject. They helped the position, and Challis felt he ought to help, too. His vanity was a little wounded ; but, then, how jolly comfortable that bed was, and what a lovely cold douche that was after a real hot bath, and what a choice cigar this was, just recently supplied by this lady’s brother ! No !—he would be generous, and help.

“How charmingly your sister draws ! I was looking at her landscapes last night.”

“She’s Prong’s favourite pupil.”

“She’s very clever ?”

“Oh yes !—she can do anything she turns her hands to. We differ on many points. But it’s impossible to deny



her cleverness. Poor Sibyl!—I suppose she can't help it."

"Can't help what?"

"Well!—rubbing me up the wrong way. But we all do that." Challis began to feel that he was in the bosom of the Family. He might ask questions freely, and did so as soon as the quiet of a retired walk in the garden allowed freedom of speech. The parroquets dropped the subject abruptly as soon as they found themselves alone.

"What's the Great Idea? I heard Lady Arkroyd talking of it to Lord Felixthorpe. It was her idea, wasn't it?"

"Do you mean Mamma's?" Judith asked. Mr. Challis had not, and hesitated a moment. Should he say, "Miss Sibyl's?" Surely no! Sunday citizens would say that. Very well, then! Should it be "Sibyl's" or "Your sister's"? He almost wished the young females of this landed family were *ladyships*: it comes so much handier for outsiders. He risked the point, and said, "Sibyl's," but softened the offence by adding, "Your sister's, I mean." If the fine eyelids were offended, they concealed it remarkably well. So much so that Mr. Challis said to himself that no doubt the Normans Christian-named more than the Saxons. Or, were those eyelids lenient towards his personal self? He was a married man, certainly; only, then!—a married man may feel flattered, look you! But this is not our affair at present. How about the Great Idea?

"Sibyl's idea, of course." The speaker accepted the Christian name; she could have said "My sister's" stiffly. "It's a perfectly mad one. A sort of new Factory, or perhaps I ought to say Institution. Everything is to be made there, only nobody is to be allowed to work there who is qualified to do anything else."

"Anything else than what?"

"Why—don't you understand? Arts and crafts. Enamels and lace and tapestry and hammered brass and copper. Not manufactures—mediæval things...."

"Oh, ah!—I know."

"All that sort of thing. Well!—the Great Idea is to take either some premises of the proper sort, or a piece of

land and build a Factory, with studios for herself and Lady Betty Inglis ; she must be in it to make Sir Spender Inglis, who's enormously rich, find half the capital. I've done *my* best . . . to prevent it. But it's no use my saying anything. Will keeps her up to it."

"Your brother?"

"Yes. You see, he's been looking into the question of building, and is certain he could build at half the usual cost. So he wants to try his hand on the Factory."

"Poor Sir Spender!"

"That's what I say. And poor Papa! However, that's not Will's only reason. He wants to build some workshops for himself to carry out experiments in wireless high-tension currents and aerostation. *I* don't understand these things."

"Your brother seems a universal genius, too?"

"Yes. But then, he took a very high degree at Cambridge. He always has that excuse. Sibyl has no degree, and ought to know better."

"What exactly is going to be done at the Factory? And are all the hands to be ladies? Or how?"

"Very much 'how?' I should say. The idea is, to employ no one who can do anything else anywhere else. People with one hand or one eye. Colour-blind guards who can't get places on railways. Deaf and dumb people that can read the Scriptures aloud automatically and never be any the wiser, don't you know?"

"Was that what your brother was talking about to your sister"—in this exact context "Sibyl" would hardly have worked in—"last night? About a blind chap he told her of. She thought he might be taught to model."

"Did they talk about him? I didn't hear them. A blind beggar-man in a street where I slum—sells matches, or pretends to. They won't get *him* to work for ten shillings a week."

"Why not?"

"Because he's earning ten shillings a day, probably, and putting by money. They do. Isn't that somebody calling me? . . . Yes. . . . I'm coming."

And then the young lady, with a parting benediction<sup>r</sup> to her hearer for the amusing talk they had had, vanished in



response to some summons which she had distinguished as intended for herself.

He for his part thought it necessary to propose to himself, and to carry unanimously, a vote of confidence in the great advantage to the brain it was to get away from one's surroundings now and again, and get a complete change. He had the hypocrisy to add that the said surroundings stood to derive benefit also, in ways not precisely specified. He felt stimulated and braced, confirmed in the image he treasured of his own identity. His interview with Miss Arkroyd had been like having the hair of his soul brushed by machinery, and called for classification. It was necessary to protest against a remark something somewhere had made, that his own home need not suffer by contrast. He indignantly repudiated the necessity for discussing the matter, as he threw away a cigar he had taken some time to smoke.

Still, he did not feel so sure on the point as not to be glad to be finally pinioned by a gentleman with a theory, whom he had provisionally escaped from at breakfast, an hour before. This was Mr. Triptolemus Wraxall, the Apostle of Universal Security, whose belief that policies and premiums were remedies for all this world's evils had taken possession of him while discharging the duties of visiting inspector to a Fire Insurance Office. In the intervals of his inspections, the object of which was to detect risks of fire in order that no policies should be issued where any such risks existed, he had evolved from his inner consciousness a number of systems, all practicable in the highest degree—almost self-acting, in fact. At least, they were none of them foolish, like the Rejected Proposal Insurance (Matrimony), which we believe fell through in consequence of the dishonest connivance of the parties, renewed proposals being frequently accepted within twenty-four hours of the payment of the sum assured. It was even reported that young ladies had advanced the first year's premium in some cases, in return for a commission of seventy-five per cent. at settlement; and that the Office was dissuaded with difficulty by its solicitors from commencing proceedings for conspiracy. An absurd scheme!

The scheme Mr. Wraxall was anxious to lay before Mr.

Challis was at least (said its inventor) worthy of serious consideration. It was a simple System of Assurance in which unborn legitimate male children would, by payment of a premium, secure to themselves the full advantages of a University education. Of course, he did not rely on their personal application—that was to be done on their behalf by their proposed parents—but it was not only ladies and gentlemen who had substantial guarantees for the appearance of these undergraduates, but *any lady and gentleman whatever* were to be at liberty to take out Policies of Assurance, the premiums getting less and less in proportion as the improbability of the couple ever having lawful issue became greater and greater. The modest sum of fifty pounds was to cover a claim for the possible son of an engaged couple (as bashfully alluded to in marriage settlements); while a full hundred was required for an infant of unknown sex awaiting advertisement in the birth column of the *Times*. On the other hand, where there was very little chance of the courtship having a successful issue (as in the case of extreme youth of the parties) the premium went down contemptuously to a sovereign. Children in arms betrothed by their parents were to enjoy all the advantages of the institution for two shillings and sixpence. But the lowest figure on the list, nine decimal point ought-six pence, was the sum for which any married gentleman could secure its benefits for the not necessarily impossible son, born in lawful wedlock of himself and *any lady*, also married elsewhere, provided that the couple were of different nationalities and each resident at home. It was thought necessary, said Mr. Wraxall, to bar cases of murder by the policy-holder, of whichever sex.

“I can’t see the necessity” said Challis. “The Office could not refuse to carry out the bargain because of suspicion of murder; and in case of conviction the chance of a family goes down to almost *nil*, because of the hanging. See?”

“Quite so, as a rule. But cases might occur of conviction and hanging deferred for months, even years. It might even happen that an insured son had become a *bénéficiaire* to the extent of a complete University education before either of his parents was arrested for murder. Such an



event would have to be provided against, or due allowance made in fixing the amount of the premium. But without going so far as that, we should meet with instances of murderers under this arrangement getting married while out on bail. A posthumous son could not be fairly branded as illegitimate because his father was hanged and his mother sentenced to penal servitude before his birth. Holy Matrimony is all that legitimacy demands."

"Couldn't you raise the premium, so as to cover all possible cases? Distaste for murder, on its merits, would tend to keep the number low. Make it eighteenpence."

"Pardon me, Mr. Challis, you do not understand Human Nature. The passing from pence to shillings marks a crucial point of its susceptibilities. For one man who will go over a shilling to provide against a defined contingency you will meet with a million who will invest pence on some chance they almost deny the existence of, simply because, if it *did* come to pass, the benefit would be so out of all proportion to the sum risked to obtain it. If an investment of one halfpenny could be shown to connect itself with a possible gain of ten million pounds, the whole population of the world would plunge to that extent. There can be no reasonable doubt that, however improbable it may seem to any married man that he should marry the widow of a particular foreigner, quite unknown, still, the advantage of having their son's education provided at a cost of nine point-ought-six pence would be an irresistible argument in favour of its outlay. Nothing short of mathematical certainty that no such son was possible would . . ."

"I understand perfectly. That is my own view. I draw the line at a shilling. To go beyond it opens up a world of immoral extravagance. . . ." The speaker felt in danger of yawning, and, to avoid it and break loose from his persecutor, had to fall back on the time-honoured expedient of inventing a neglected duty elsewhere. He drew his watch suddenly from its pocket with the *verve* of an angler landing a fish, and exclaimed with sudden deep conviction: "I really must run!"

And Mr. Alfred Challis ran, and found that letters for the Post had to be ready at eleven forty-five. He had come away from home with the best intentions of writing a line

every day to his wife, and, indeed, had meant to write long humorous letters with satirical descriptions of the British Toff at Home, all the points of which would make good copy after, as it was only Marianne. It wasn't like repeating a published article. But this time it would have to be a line, or at most a sheet of note-paper; and it was, accordingly.

When one has arrived at the time of life when one weighs beforehand each sentence one writes, even to an intimate friend—instead of dashing recklessly on, as in one's glorious youth—how glad one sometimes is to be put under compulsion about the contents of a letter! Challis wouldn't acknowledge his obligation to the coercion of the Postal limit—not he! But he felt it all the same. For he couldn't have filled out his letter with Universal Security. Marianne wouldn't have understood a word of it. It wasn't her line. And as for his long talk with Judith Arkroyd . . . well, now!—why on earth couldn't he just write that he had had one, and that she had told him a lot about the family, and he would write a long letter about it next time, but really this was only a line to catch the Post. Why not, indeed? Yes, of course, that was the proper thing to write. He wrote it, and denied the pause, to his own satisfaction. But he was grateful to the Post for being so coercive and superseding, and cancelling all considerations of—of what? He denied that there was anything to cancel, and directed the letter.



## CHAPTER V

A LITTLE bit of duty done always seems at its best when it has taken the form of a written letter. Because when the time comes for posting, whatever the letter may contain—whether it be a lame apology for breaking an engagement, or a promise to send a cheque without fail next week—the penny stamp and the direction are just the same as if it had been to reproach Angela for not appearing yesterday at church-parade in Hyde Park, or had enclosed a final discharge of your tailor's account. So Mr. Challis's rather perfunctory line to catch the Post, boldly stamped and directed, quite set his mind at ease about his home obligations as soon as ever it was licked and stuck to, past recall.

In fact, so relieved was his conscience, after he had handed this letter to Elphinstone the butler to see that it went to the Post for him, that he felt quite at liberty to enjoy some more soul-brush the next time the chance came. All the more from a conviction of the importance of its contents conveyed by the professional manner of Mr. Elphinstone's reception of it—a manner that said, "*This* really important letter *shall* go, whatever other don't!" If his enjoyment of the soul-brush became too oppressive to his conscience, he could square accounts by an extra sheet or so of letter-paper.

Anyhow, he could now live for the present. He was rather disgusted to find that, whatever he decided on to enjoy next, it would have to be in the house, unless he was prepared to get wet out of doors. For, taking a mean advantage of him while he was writing his short letter, it had come on to rain.

In a country-house, when it comes on to rain after a fine early morning, despair settles on the household, which wanders about moaning, and looking for someone to come

and have a game at billiards ; or lamenting the cruel fate which has beguiled it into putting its things on, and now it supposes that it had better go and take them off again and settle down to something, because it's going to pour ; or asking what was the name of that capital game we played every day at Fen Grange, for instance, when it rained for three weeks on end, and nobody was the least bored. It is in sad hours such as this that you seek for a chess-opponent and find none, except a class of player that knows the moves, whom you fly from candidly ; and then, if fortunate, you may meet with one of another class, who has forgotten the openings. Secure him, but don't let him set you an interesting problem and run away.

"I've never played, but I should like to learn. Only I really don't know where the men are. Nobody plays here, you see, and they get lost or hidden in cupboards." Thus Judith in the second hour of a steady downpour to Mr. Challis's inquiry, for he was always ready for a game at chess, without being keen about it.

"You are not getting on with your book, anyhow !" said he. "Can't I hunt about for the chessmen till I find them ?" The book was one he had recommended at the first coming of the rain, and it was when it was closed in despair that Challis asked his question.

"I think we must ask Elphinstone. Would you ring ?" Challis rang, and a sub. who appeared was instructed to consult Mr. Elphinstone. Judith continued : "No !—I hate sinners who are touched by the *Dies Iræ* in a cathedral and repent, especially when they've got too old to do any real mischief. I would sooner they went to the Devil honestly...." And so the chat ran on, Challis cordially concurring, and not hinting at any joy whatever over the sinner that repenteth, until the young man Samuel came back with chessmen. There was another set, of ivory, it appeared, but Mr. Elphinstone had desired Samuel to say that a prawn was defective, and one of the bishops was out of his socket, and couldn't be got to screw in. Samuel had been put to it to charge his memory with this obscure message ; he was confident about the prawn, but had misgiving about the bishop—feared it was disrespectful to the Church per-



haps ; but went away relieved when nothing explosive came of it. His situation was safe.

Many of us know that teaching chess is no sinecure. The *alumnus* who refuses to accept the rules as they stand ; who wants to know why the pawns may not move backwards ; why the pieces may not jump over, like in draughts ; why the queen should have such absurd latitude ; who thinks all the black pieces should remain on the black squares, and *per contra*—how well we know him ! And the difficulty a peculiar class of intellect has in mastering the knight's move, condemning it on its merits, as too much like squinting, or italics ! And another yet, which, on being shown how to make a particular move, makes it, and says contentiously : “ Well !—I don't see anything so very clever in that.”

Miss Arkroyd did not quite do any of these things, but she was nearly as bad. She remembered the moves in the abstract, but forgot which of the pieces made them ; and this answered as well as forgetting the moves, for all purposes of confusion. With so beautiful a hand it couldn't matter how much she fingered the pieces. And Mr. Challis seemed very contented. The instruction was a farce, but it served its turn, and a sort of appearance of a game developed while the rain outside came steadily down, and checkmated everyone in the house. Desultory chat, in which the question, “ Whose move is it ? ” frequently occurred, helped Challis to a further insight into family conditions and local history. *En revanche* the young lady added to her impressions of Challis's own domestic circumstances and his literary career, and found that an image was forming in her mind of Mrs. Challis. It wasn't a beautiful image, but it was worthy. It was that of a good soul. But not a good sort of body—nothing so bad as that ! She felt glad, for Challis's sake. A good soul and the best of wives ; that kind of thing ! You couldn't expect education of very finished achievement in those sort of people, in the class she came from. For Miss Arkroyd had got somehow a perfectly clear impression of a class undefinable, but homogeneous and recognisable by symptoms. A class that didn't dress for dinner, a class that liked potatoes in their skins as a palliative to cold moist roast

mutton *d' obbligo* , and did not condemn, but merely looked coldly on, at *menu's* and finger-glasses. A class whose males smoked pipes and whose females refused cigarettes ; which, though its young learned French at school, condemned France as the most salient foreign incident on an incorrigibly foreign Continent, and a perfect moral plague-spot of unfaithful wives and husbands.

But however good a soul this man's wife was, Judith caught herself being sorry for him. Yesterday evening, when she went good-naturedly to him, as to her mother's latest discovery, just to say a few words and prevent his getting left out in the cold, he had seemed to her only moderately interesting, and far from handsome. Now she began with a discriminating eye to see that, though he was far from handsome, he was just as far from ugly. Still, she perceived that it did credit to her discriminating eye to find this out. She hadn't noticed it so much when he turned up unexpectedly in the garden in the morning—unexpectedly, because she was really unconscious of having said in his hearing that she was going across the lawn to feed her birds. But now, in a lucky half-light in the red drawing-room, with his eyes dropped on the chess-board, his forehead and eye-framing had a look about them that was certainly interesting, if not a good substitute for beauty. Judith would have preferred the beauty, certainly ; but she could look contentedly at the good soul's property, and go on wondering what *she* was like, while he considered knotty points connected with the game.

“ You've put your king in check, Miss Arkroyd. You mustn't do that.” He looked up suddenly and caught her eyes. Her *rapport* with the game saved him from his vanity by good luck. “ I see you thought you had caught me,” was his interpretation of her gaze. It was in token of a supposed triumph, so he thought. Whatever it was, it became disconcerted.

“ Oh !—mustn't I do that ? I think it oughtn't to count, when one does it oneself. Don't you ?” Challis said to himself that this woman was rather a goose. Why he felt a little disappointed at her being rather a goose he could not have said off-hand. He apologized for the stupidity of the laws of games generally ; said they were



clearly wrong all round. But it would make such a lot of fuss to alter them now that he doubted if it was worth it.

"You're not in earnest, Mr. Challis?" So the lady spoke, and Challis said to himself that Marianne would never have found that out. "Sharp, by comparison!" was his comment to himself; and then aloud: "But I can't have you bored, Miss Arkroyd. You don't care about this." To which Judith replied: "It's not exciting, so far;" and both laughed. The discovery that each had been thinking the same thing was full of conductivities. It improved their footing.

"It can't be, you know, when you come to think of it," said he, pushing his chair expressively three inches back—an expression of renunciation—with a slight boredom-admitting stretch. "Chess requires apprenticeship before it can be enjoyed, like smoking."

"I see. And this game has made me sick, like a boy's first cigar. Why didn't you tell me?"

"One must begin some time.... Well! I don't know either. Must one?..."

"There was nothing else to do."

"We might have gone into the billiard-room and heard politics. I heard them going on through the door a little while ago. Mr.... what's his name?—the politician..."

"Mr. Ramsey Tomes?"

"Mr. Ramsey Tomes. I gathered that he was giving details of his great scheme of Reciprocal Interdependent Taxation of Imports—what he touched upon at dinner last night...."

"Don't let me disturb the chess!" says a passer through the room. It is Lady Arkroyd with an armful of some form of embroidery which no one is on any account to assist her in carrying to the drawing-room beyond. But what she means is, "Don't arrest my progress. Mind your own business." Challis makes a convulsive suggestion of willingness to assist the Universe, but doesn't mean anything at all by it; and her ladyship floats away, leaving him normal. But his plunge, overdone from dramatic motives, has knocked the board over. The Fates seem to league together to throw cold water on this ill-starred

game. Judith conveys the fact by a shrug, but adds a smile, that it may be understood there is no *amertume* in the situation. Further, she says she can hear Tea. A sense that Life's problem is solved for the moment mixes with a consciousness of hairbrush-time come again, and Mr. Challis disperses to reassemble presently and enjoy it.

How it is pouring, to be sure! And how grateful one feels to it—abstraction though it be—for doing it in earnest, and making an end of all doubts whether we may not get out for a turn later. Nobody is going to do that to-day.

Challis encounters young Lord Felixthorpe on the stairs, coming from the billiard-room. He is always amiable and well-mannered, this young nobleman, and manages to make everyone think he has their good opinion of him at heart. But he often seems to be seeking their sympathy with his derision of someone else. Or of himself, for that matter—so Challis goes on thinking, for all this is what passes in *his* mind; the story does not vouch for its truth. During their slow ascent of the great staircase together, he is more than half-convinced that the young toff really cares about his views on motoring.

“I am quite aware,” says his lordship, pausing at a corner, as though one might go upstairs at any slowness, even with the young man Samuel and a colleague agglomerating gilded porcelain within hearing, as tea-factors. “I am quite aware, my dear Mr. Challis, that the motor-car is at present an object of execration to the public. But I sympathize so keenly that I feel bound to spend as much time as possible in the only place in which I am not tempted to forget myself and use bad language against motorists. I refer to the motor-car itself. Believe me that the only thing that can reconcile a well-constituted mind to any practice essentially damnable is the practice itself. I shall look forward to your accompanying me in my Panhard, after a profusion of curses perfectly reasonably directed against it—in which you will have my sincerest sympathy.”

“When do you expect the detestable contrivance—I make no disguises, you see—to arrive? I shall be here for a week, if my hosts continue to tolerate me.”

“It ought to be here now. From the fact that it is *not* here now, I am led to infer that something has happened.



In this cautious expression you will kindly observe that it includes the possibility that my chauffeur, Louis Rossier, has got drunk on the road, and has stopped the night at an inn to become sober."

"Or he may have been poisoned by petroleum."

"Yes, or his head may have been cut off by a police-wire, stretched across the road in the dark. But in that case I fancy we should have heard."

When Challis descended the stairs, he paused to look out at the great window with the quarried grisaille and armorial bearings in each light, and saw through a quarry temporarily repaired with common window-glass a clear view of the approach to the house, dutifully draining off the deluge that continued to fall steadily—steadily—on the gravel road the great beech avenue took such care of, standing on each side of it all the way to just this side of the Lodge. How well he knew what that soaked gravel would have to say to the pedestrian who ventured out—what it *was* saying to that unhappy man in some sort of oilskin costume who was coming slowly, jadedly along, above his undersquelch and below an umbrella that can have done him very little good. Mr. Challis saw at a glance that he was not indigenous to the soil; a second glance determined that he was a Frenchman; a third that he was a chauffeur. Certainly Louis Rossier—who else? He smiled as a non-motorist smiles when a motor comes to grief. When he reached the drawing-room, Mr. Ramsay Tomes was already applying for a second cup. That gentleman was thirsty, no doubt. He had talked for two hours. Not that he meant to stop—far from it!

Challis had no one to talk to for the moment, so he listened to Mr. Tomes, who went on again as soon as he had made sure there were two lumps.

"I start from an aspect of the question that must compel the most incredulous to admit that at least the matrix is ripe for solution."

As the orator paused a moment, everyone felt bound to fructify a little, and said, "I see, you propose to . . ." or, "I see your idea . . ." or merely got as far as, "I see you . . ." and remained stranded. All except the disciple

of Graubosch, who muttered knowingly, "The Brandenbierenschreiligrath System. Graubosch's Appendix B. deals with it." He and Mr. Wraxall exchanged astute nods; the latter to oblige, because he really knew nothing about it. But Mr. Tomes wasn't going to leave anything vague. Not he!—a man with a fixed glare, and loaded to the muzzle with exhaustive elucidation!

Challis did not wait for the next instalment. He cast about for an anchorage, and had not found a satisfactory one when Lord Felixthorpe, who had not appeared at the beginning of Tea, came into the room with something to communicate written on his countenance.

"What's gone amiss, Scip?" said his friend, William Rufus.

"That idiot Rossier . . ."

"I told you he was a fool. What's he done now?"

"Left the machine in a ditch, and walked home through the mud. . . . Oh no, he hasn't hurt himself. I wish he had—in moderation." The public becomes interested, and explanation spreads over the room. A lady's voice says, afar, that its owner supposes now we shall lose our excursion, and that place will be gone, and it would have been the very thing. Challis doesn't understand this, and asks Judith the meaning. He is in her neighbourhood somehow—seems to have sacrificed hearing more about the accident. She supposes Sibyl meant the place for the Great Idea. But they couldn't have gone to-morrow unless the weather mended, anyhow.

People chatter so in a full room; you soon lose threads of conversation. Challis knew little more about either the accident or the Great Idea when he went away to dress for dinner an hour later. He was only aware that Mr. Tomes was still at work on the Reciprocal Interdependent Taxation of Imports, and that Miss Arkroyd was going to play Halma with him if he came up soon enough after dinner.

In his letter to Marianne, written after he went up to his room rather early—people are very apt to think it's getting on for bed-time after rain-beleaguered days in country-houses—Mr. Challis merely mentioned two games at Halma, and adduced the exciting character of that game.



as a reason why very little was said. His letter implied that he was being bored, which was untrue. However, the words "in the house all day" would do that without an antidote. And we couldn't expect him to mention the soul-brush, especially as he disallowed its existence. He said a good deal of what he did know of the motor-car mishap, which was natural, for—so he said—he had inferred, from the excitement on the subject, that this car, when it appeared, would be the first ever seen by most of the inhabitants of the district.

This machine was the latest extravagance of young Lord Felixthorpe, who had spent a thousand pounds upon it; and its arrival from the agent at Grime, who was to welcome it—or rather its components—to England, and to qualify it for the enjoyment of its riders, and the execrations of its victims, was looked forward to with feverish anxiety by both. But he could not give such details as were supplied next day, after a fuller sifting of Louis Rossier's report, which was not very intelligible at first. These had to wait for a postscript, which told how the chauffeur, who did not understand three words of English, had proved as sensitive to misdirection as the compass is to the magnetic current. He went the wrong way instinctively several times, and was headed back, or finger-pointed back, just as often. In the end he made an unfortunate choice between two roads, although warned by a long shouted instruction from a turnip-field—which ignored his nationality robustly—that the cross-over bridge, when he come to Sto'an's mill, nigh the running wa'ater, wasn't to be troosted to carry lo'ads; and the shouter would be rather shoy of it, in yower place. But you might take e'er a one of they two ways, at your liking. Being none the wiser, Louis Rossier chose the more tempting one; and when he came to the cross-over bridge, which spanned a ditch, could not, of course, tell the meaning of the Local Authority's posted caution to the effect that nothing over two tons was to use it; with the result that it gave way in the middle. It was too small a bridge to let any vehicle larger than a goat-chaise through, and almost too small a ditch to accommodate one, but the motor was trapped and detained in its sunk centre.

"You'll have to get to t' Hall on Sha'anks's mear, yoong

ma-an," said a native, who was not really taking pains to hide his joy at the mishap. Louis got to the Hall, but didn't know he had ridden Shanks's mare.

However, for a first accident with a new Panhard, it wasn't so bad! Only one tyre ruined; its comrade was mendable. In the end the gorgeous scarlet vehicle was got to the house by horses, and was recovering its spirits and snorting, with the new spare tyre on, by the time the company at the Hall had eaten too much lunch, and were arranging how they would spend their afternoon. Challis had despatched his letter of the previous night, and was enjoying himself. A gloriously fine day, following an isolated local depression of the barometer, had removed the local depressions the latter had occasioned to everyone else, and Miss Arkroyd had ended a second interview over the parroquets by promising to take him to see the Roman and British camps on the other side of the village.

The first really professional excursion of the new motor was to be dedicated to the Great Idea. For the Great Idea, however vaguely it was formulated, was clear about one thing. Premises would be *de rigueur*. It was therefore incumbent on its promoters to inspect premises, both in town and country. At present the latter was the more popular, because the weather was superb, and the notion of incorporating with the Factory a Village Community, and perhaps a Garden City, both in the evening with a flawless Autumn sky, was too tempting to be neglected. So, this afternoon, William Rufus and Sibyl and Lord Felixthorpe—in spite of an impression he gave that he was treating the Great Idea with derision—were to run over to Whealhope Paulswell, about thirty miles off, in the motor, to give that treasure a baptismal run and inspect an extinct factory, which had been empty a quarter of a century. They would be back by dinner-time.

Sir Murgatroyd, of whom we have seen nothing, as he has been continually talking about the ruin of English Trade with Mr. Ramsay Tomes, was going to take that gentleman to see some manure. People can look at some manure, and talk about nefarious Germany, both at once. There is reason to suppose that these two gentlemen talked of very



little but the ruin of English Trade during the whole of this visit to Royd. And wherever any member of the household was employed—we are recording the impressions of Mr. Alfred Challis—he or she could always hear, in the remote distance, what was only too clearly Mr. Tomes taking this opportunity to state, once for all; or Sir Murgatroyd feeling bound, alike as a Statesman and an Englishman, to protest against. A steady, continuous rumble, on these lines, accompanied the not particularly busy hum of men, women, and chits, that made up the round of life at Royd. The chits, by-the-by, of which there were two or three, naturally involved a corresponding number of young men, each to each; or each in the pocket of each, as you choose. None of them seemed the least ashamed of never having a word to throw at anyone outside the pocket, except its owner, and the rest of Europe seemed by common consent to take no notice of them. And all the while each one, and the contents of its pocket, was, like enough—so thought Mr. Challis—the centre of an incubation of memories that were to last a lifetime. “As they bake, so they will brew,” philosophized Mr. Challis to himself, and clouded over a little as he remembered that he, too, was in his twenties once. Four of them played lawn-tennis that afternoon, and the others got somehow lost sight of. No matter!

Lady Arkroyd had the carriage, and drove over to Thanet Castle, to see the Duchess of Rankshire before the Royalties came. But she wasn’t at all sure she wouldn’t have done something else if she had known that Judith was going to cry off at the last minute. She relied a good deal on her eldest daughter as a factor in social intercourse. But she didn’t confess it.

“What on earth is the girl going to do with herself? How can you be so tiresome, Ju? Now do just get ready and come. There’s no hurry. I can wait.”

“Now, Madre dear, you really ought to know by this time how bored I always am with the sort of people they get at the Castle. And I’ve got letters to write. I must answer Lady Kitty about the orchids.”

“Nonsense, girl! You can’t be all the afternoon over *that*.”

“ I shall go out later. In an hour or so. I dare say I shall take Mr.—what’s his name?—Harris—round the village and show him the Roman Camp. He’ll know what castrametation means, and things . . . ”

“ Mr. ‘ Titus Scroop ’? My dear!—he’s as happy as he can be talking to that idiot Brownrigg about Metaphysics and nonsense. Do let him alone ! ”

“ Well!—I dare say I shall. Or otherwise, as may be. But I won’t come to Thanes. Love to the Duchess.”

Judith was a stronger character than her mother, and won. As the latter was driven off, she said to herself, for no apparent reason, “ Mr. Titus Scroop.”

Lady Arkroyd was in the habit of asking every celebrity she came across to her house, because she worshipped genius. But she took the genius for granted if she saw any author, artist, or musician’s name often enough in print. Was she sometimes rash? Well—yes—sometimes! Perhaps a doubt about “ Titus Scroop’s ” genius was the reason she said his name. But if so, why did it lead to a resolve in her mind to ask Mrs. Candour—the Mrs. Candour of the moment, whom she was sure to meet at Thanes—more about Mrs. “ Titus Scroop ”? She kept thinking of it, off and on, all the way to the park gates with the dragon-sentinels on piers on each side presenting arms.

And all the while Challis was being bored by that idiot Brownrigg, and wishing anyone would come and rescue him. He resented the idea that he had any special rescuer in view. But no one had said he had. However, Miss Arkroyd had certainly spoken about a walk to the Roman Camp; so naturally he would cast her for the part, don’t you see?



## CHAPTER VI

THE gentleman spoken of so disrespectfully by his hostess was Mr. Adolphus Brownrigg, who was an enthusiastic disciple of the great German philosopher Graubosch, whose scheme embodied a complete Reorganization of Society on an entirely new basis. But whereas all previous reorganizers of Society had started on the fallacious and mischievous line of breaking up existing institutions and replacing them by others of their own devising, this reformer proposed to utilise them all as portions of his new System. Thus the reigning Sovereign would fall easily into his place of Chairman of a great Central Committee of Management, retaining the Crown as a distinguishing badge of his office the existing machinery of Parliamentary election would answer equally well for the Members of the Central Committee ; the Bench would supply us with a most satisfactory staff for what he termed Courts of Discriminative Decision, and so on, and so on. Even the very Policemen's Uniforms would be available for the new staff of Order-Keepers and Crime-Preventors that formed part of his System. Nay, the Coinage itself would come in useful as Exchangeable Tokens in his new Method of Sale and Purchase Accommodation.

"What attitude does Professor Graubosch adopt towards the Religions of the world ?" asked Challis, as he and the advocate of this new Reform walked about the garden, discussing it.

"Graubosch," replied the latter, "is, broadly speaking, in favour of their complete abolition. Nor do I myself think any continuation of them would be found necessary, in view of his new System of Metaphysical Checks. No one recognises more fully than Graubosch the necessity for Moral Restraint derived from a Consciousness of the Unseen, whether acting as a stimulus in connection with

an exalted and unselfish anxiety for personal rewards throughout Eternity, or as a deterrent resulting from the anticipation of unpleasantness hereafter, especially of continuous oxidation with evolution of caloric. But the new System provides for both."

"As, for instance ? . . ."

"For instance, in respect of the Idea of a Deity. . . . But perhaps, Mr. Challis, your own views on this subject are . . . a . . . well defined ? I should be sorry to . . . to . . ."

"To give offence ? Pray don't feel any scruples on my account."

"Well, I will continue. In respect of this Idea of a Deity, it is true that Graubosch abolishes God, as such. But his System claims to provide a substitute ; and this substitute is, to my thinking, superior in many respects for working purposes to the Idea it displaces. The first Metaphysical Check he formulates is the Invariable Necessary Antecedent. The acceptance of this as an inevitable condition of thought is an essential of the System of Graubosch."

"How does it act as a check ?"

"It is rather long to follow out ; but, put as briefly as I can, it is somewhat thus : Graubosch admits the possibility of an infinite number of successions of Antecedents, as we have an infinite number of results or sequents. But the effect on the Metaphysician of contemplating such a condition of the Universe is fatal to reasoning, and may easily produce suspension of the faculties. Philosophy stipulates for a *modus vivendi* ; and as a working necessity for argument, if for no other reason, Graubosch refers the whole of the Universe to *one* Invariable Necessary Antecedent ; which he accepts, for reasons which appear to me satisfactory, as obviously superior to any one unit of its results or sequences. We have no right, he says, to assume that *any* result or consequence is not achievable by such an Antecedent."

"I concur, on the whole. Does Graubosch ascribe intelligence, in our sense of the word, to this Antecedent ?"

"Certainly not. Intelligence is merely a sequence or consequence of some minute fraction . . . of . . . of its power."



“Why did you hesitate?”

“From a feeling that Power itself may only be a finite humanism, so to speak—an Entity on all fours with Intelligence. But the Metaphysician has to leave himself a few words, to speak with. Now the idea of *greater* and *less* is axiomatic, and it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that *our* Intelligence is a lesser thing than its working substitute in the Invariable and Necessary Antecedent.”

“I quite understand. To create Intelligence, its Creator when creating himself must go one better—break his own anticipated record. What are Graubosch’s views about Good and Evil? They both are factors in our existing System, especially the latter.”

“He ignores both, as antiquated and unnecessary. In his System, the fruitless discussions about which is which—where one ends and the other begins, and so on—disappear entirely.”

“That sounds good. Vice and Virtue could shake hands over it—a Coalition Ministry, don’t you know?”

“Pardon me!—the exact reverse. Party Government would be intensified. But I ought to describe what Graubosch terms the *Plus* and *Minus* of his System, in its Moral or Ethical aspects. The first expression recognises in what has been hitherto absurdly called ‘Good’ merely the Invariable and Necessary Antecedent leaking out, so to speak, and becoming perceptible to our Senses. The second, in what has been equally absurdly called ‘Evil,’ its diminution or repression.”

Challis yawned. He was getting bored. “Does not that,” he said, “assume the existence of some counter-power, able to diminish and repress?”

“Graubosch avoids doing so. And therein lies the beauty of his System. His *Minus* is simply negation of his *Plus*. An exact parallel is supplied by the phenomena of light and darkness. To ascribe to darkness powers of extinguishing light is scientifically absurd.”

“I see.” Challis spoke in a winding-up tone. His bore perceived it, and dexterously pinioned him.

“Pardon me one moment more,” he said. “We are at a point where the beauty of the System becomes most manifest. I refer to it elasticity—its power of

utilising, provisionally at any rate, existing Institutions pending its maturer development. Graubosch does not doubt the efficacy at some future date of the Metaphysical Check on our propensities supplied by the *Plus* and *Minus* of his System. But he proposes for the present—at least, until believers in a Personal God from early youth have had time to die out—to postpone the *Plus* which is to take his place. Also—and this is important in connection with the operation of Metaphysical Checks—he is favourable to the retention of a Personal Devil until the Masses have acquired an insight into Metaphysics. . . .”

“I must ask you to excuse me,” said Mr. Challis. “I have letters to write, and they say the Post goes at twelve. . . .”

“But I hope I have impressed you favourably. We must bear in mind . . .”

“Most favourably, my dear sir. And it seems to me that if we only let things alone vigorously enough, we may regard Professor Graubosch’s great Reform as already in operation. . . .” Mr. Challis paused on behalf of a newcomer, to whom he resumed: “Not at all, Miss Arkroyd . . . not the least! I assure you Mr. Brownrigg and I have talked the subject dry. . . . No!—I really am speaking the truth.” This with absolute fervour.

“Because I do so hate interrupting,” said Judith, who had been waiting to speak. “And I saw you were so interested. But I can say what I have to say and go—and then you can finish.” Mr. Challis looked dejected, and Judith continued: “I only wanted to say that I shall be walking down to the village presently, and could show you the Roman and British camps and the prehistoric monolith.” Mr. Challis looked elated. “Only *presently*, when you have really had your talk out. I shall be on the terrace.” Mr. Challis was just on the point of arresting Miss Arkroyd’s departure by another violent profession of intense completion of the subject in hand, when prudence murmured in his ear that his bore mustn’t be allowed to come too. Now a pretence that he was yearning for three words more, and would then meet the lady on the terrace, just served to place Mr. Brownrigg in the position of a fixture. It localised him. Otherwise he might have



moved with the train of events, unshaken off. Even as it was, a very vigorous "I really mustn't keep Miss Arkroyd waiting any longer" was wanted to effect the extraction—for it was quite like tooth-drawing. But the force of handling—as the art-critics phrase it—was so strong that Mr. Brownrigg couldn't say, "Why shouldn't I come too. I should like to know?" He *would* have, nevertheless. But he had to give the point up, and went to look for Mr. Wraxall.

Judith was waiting on the terrace, looking handsome. She was wrestling with an intractable glove-button, and her hand that was operative was embarrassed by her sunshade having been taken into its confidence. Mr. Challis could hold the sunshade, clearly. A very simple thing! And when the glove-button socketed into its metallic nidus, and was satisfactory, how obvious for the young lady to take that sunshade back again, with a profusion of thanks as for a great service done! But did the little incident leave the two performers exactly where it found them? Sometimes things of this sort don't. Things of what sort, do you ask? Well!—you see, we are watching Mr. Alfred Challis's mind, and can, for the present, only answer—the sort that made that gentleman conscious that the twenties and he had parted company many years ago.

Perhaps, however, it's only one of those nonsensical ideas Sibyl gets (now, if you please, we are peering into the lady's mind) when she tells her sister that flirtations with married men are detestable. However, this time Sibyl couldn't have a word to say—a literary man with an attenuated beard, and hair that seems to have thought of curling once, and then thought better of it, and gone a little grey hesitatingly! And a weak mouth! And a lay-down collar! And such clothes! No!—this time Sibyl could find no excuse. If this man wasn't safe, you might as well have no male friends or even acquaintances at all, and live in a harem.

Besides, there was something very interesting about his eyes and forehead, which were his good points. Oh yes!—his hands were not bad. They looked sensitive, and showed the bones. Judith's mind made swift excursion

down a side-alley. What was the impossible Mrs. Challis like to live with, she wondered? Did he adore her, or how? Perhaps she wasn't really a "good soul" at all, but adorable—in reason.

"Thank you so much, Mr. Challis. I always get into such a mess with buttons. I hope you are not afraid of dogs, because Saladin must come with us. He never gets any exercise unless I take him out." A huge Danish boarhound, conscious that he was spoken of, looked up and appeared to sanction the use of his name. He had smelt Mr. Challis, and found some excuse for him, presumably, in some nicety of bouquet human nostrils know not of.

"Saladin's welcome," said he. "But I'm like Br'er Rabbit—a mighty puny man myself, and I may very easily git trompled. . . ." For Saladin was appalling.

"What's that out of?"

"Uncle Remus."

"I suppose I ought to read Uncle Remus?"

"Yes; but don't if you don't like."

"Not if I ought to?"

"The ought is not a high moral ought. You ought to read Uncle Remus if you want something amusing to read."

"I haven't much time for reading, and I want to read 'The Epidermis.' Everyone tells me I shall enjoy it."

"Perhaps everyone knows. I don't feel so much confidence myself. Read Uncle Remus first, anyhow. If you do that, I'll ask you to accept a copy of 'tother one, from the Author."

"I've just written off for a copy to the publisher."

"Oh!—have you?—I would tell him to transfer the order to my account—only that takes all the edge off the proceeding"

"When did Uncle Remus come out first?"

"Oh—a long time ago! It's odd to think how long. I'm over forty. I was almost a boy."

"Perhaps that's why you liked it so much? Fancy your being fourteen years older than me!"

"Perhaps." The last half of Miss Arkroyd's remark had to go without answer. It was too parenthetical to call for one.



Experience teaches us that there is no meshwork of circumstance into which flatter conversation may weave itself than the combination of a married man, a young woman, and a walk out on a fine afternoon, of set purpose. At least, that was the text of a literary reflection of Mr. Challis at this juncture. He put it away in a mental storehouse for his next book. Its truth or falsehood is immaterial at present.

Judith made no mental note of what *her* experience taught ; but she knew she couldn't stand being bored, and she felt it coming. She had made up her mind to have an amusing walk with this popular favourite. And Sibyl might say what she liked, but she wouldn't be balked !

A sense of intended impertinence may have heightened her colour slightly, as she stopped and turned the fine eyes full on to her companion. He stopped, too, looking round.

"Mr. Challis, I want you to tell me something. . . . No !—don't promise till you know what it is. . . ."

"I am sure, Miss Arkroyd, you will ask me nothing I should hesitate to tell you. . . ."

"Don't be too confident . . . it's very impertinent !"

"All right—go on ! I'll forgive you."

"Is 'Ziz' in the 'Spendthrift's Legacy' Mrs. Challis ?"

"My wife ? Marianne ?" Mr. Challis was conscious of being reminded of his wife. A fine *nuance* of ashamedness—it could hardly be called shame—affected his mind, surely ? Else why note the perfectly obvious fact that if he and Marianne were never to forget each other for a single instant, life would be insupportable to both. Perhaps he can hardly be said to have noted it, though ; suppose we say that he declined to note it, consciously, because of its absurd irrelevance.

"Yes !—Marianne." Judith's eyes, with no concession in them of any shade of impertinence in the use of Mrs. Challis's Christian name, waited for the answer, as she still stood, not stirring. Was she saying to herself that this was tit-for-tat ; a *riposte* for his "Sibyl" of their talk in the morning ? Saladin, not used to this sort of thing, waited also, reproachfully. Challis, rather accepting "Marianne" as a sanction of his "Sibyl," was again conscious that his soul was being brushed by machinery—not

an intrusive brush, though ; an easy one he could ignore. His answer was not difficult.

“ Not a particle of resemblance between them ! Ziz was a ”—he stopped himself just in time—“ a . . . a . . . almost a sort of professional beauty.” The one word “ professional ” made all the difference—saved the position.

Now, Judith had a habit of despising dangerous ground in social intercourse ; it was part of what Mr. Challis had called her *prepotente* disposition. She would always put her horse at a quickset hedge if any image crossed her mind of the finger of Discretion, the monitress ; especially if it looked like Sibyl’s. While Mr. Challis was breathing freely about his dexterous escape, she made up her mind to know all about this impossible person who wasn’t a professional beauty. As to how she should get at this knowledge, that was another matter. All she could see her way to at the moment was—not to be in a hurry and spoil her chances. But she was very much mistaken if she couldn’t do with this man, whom she thought of as nerves and brains and very little else, what she had done before now with stronger men than he—viz., twist him round her little finger.

“ Ah !—I’m so glad,” said she. And then, as though to clothe her pause in walking with the semblance of a moment of mental tension, she resumed movement forward. Saladin emphasized her action by a single tremendous bark, and did the same. A startled waterfowl decided that his position was untenable, and condemned the neighbourhood, going off in a bee-line with a rush. Two horses out at grass galloped round their field, and stood at gaze, with open nostrils. Of which events Saladin, their source and origin, took no notice, but moved on, smelling the planet gently and thoughtfully.

“ Why are you glad ?” asked Challis. “ You didn’t like Ziz, I suppose ?” A note of pique in his voice. The young lady’s confidence about the finger-twisting grew.

“ I *admired* her,” she said with marked emphasis. “ She fascinated me down to the ground. But . . . if you ask me . . . you mustn’t mind my saying, you know . . .”

“ I can’t tell you how I enjoy hearing what you really think. No compliments, please !”

“ Well . . . if I can express myself ! I should say your



heroine's was rather a . . . rather a . . . *shrill* personality. I don't mean unlovable, exactly, but . . . well ! . . . I can't think of any other way of putting it."

"She was meant to be excitable. Neurotic, as the slang goes nowadays. Marianne is neither. I hope you liked the reconciliation scene by the open grave, and the way they appeal, as it were, to the coffin for forgiveness. Some of the reviews thought it strained."

"Strained !—oh no ! It seemed to me in some ways one of the most touching things I ever read. And her explanation to Septimus that she had divorced him on principle in order that he should marry Julia, and both get a chance of recovering their position in society. . . . But do tell me—only it's hardly fair to ask—did you mean that *she* put the arsenic in Julia's coffee, or the negress ?"

"I leave that an open question for the reader to speculate about. But you may rest assured of one thing, Miss Arkroyd—the young person in my novel is about as unlike my dear wife as she can be." He had determined to pay some little tribute to his dear wife as soon as the chance came, that she should lie less upon his conscience. Here it was. "Marianne is the exact opposite—a pussycat upon the hearthrug—a . . . kettle singing on the hob, you might almost say. She's not exactly what's called a clever woman, certainly. . . ."

"But she is none the worse for that ! How I do hate clever women !" All the same, Judith thought to herself : "Why couldn't he leave her in peace, on the hearthrug or the hob ?" His last reservation had spoiled his little tribute, and, indeed, he felt it himself. Bother !

Setting it right would make it worse. In spite of a fervent murmur from the young lady, that she felt she knew exactly what Mrs. Challis was like, and that they would be sure to understand each other, and what a pity it was Mrs. Challis had not been able to come, he felt he would do best to *brusquer* the conversation. He couldn't well say "Marianne isn't here because your mother never invited her—only told her she might come." So, feeling that if he could detach the conversation from Marianne personally he did not very much care by what means the end was effected, he made a fragmentary remark to the effect that

he *had* had an original in his mind for the neurotic heroine, but quite a different person from his wife—utterly unlike her. “Unlike in appearance—individuality—everything! Is that the market-cross?” No, it wasn’t the market-cross; it was the pump. So Mr. Challis’s conclusion did very little towards its object.

Judith halted as before, after establishing the pump. She knew she was going to be impertinent again; and drawled a word or two to that effect, to get on a safe footing. “But do forgive me,” she said, “if I ask who the lady was. You needn’t tell me, you know.” And then, as Challis wavered between disclosure and concealment, put in a word to clinch matters: “Treat me as a friend. We can always quarrel, you know!” The soul-brush seemed to go a little quicker.

This author was a man who fancied he understood womankind—and probably his was a fair average of knowledge in a department where so much ignorance exists. But there was one sort of woman he could *not* understand—the woman with a stronger nature than his own. He had only mixed with his equals, so far. He could be quite unaware that he was being influenced—could still persuade himself, as a tribute to his manhood, that he was acting from a politic motive. He could make an astute note that his insight into humanity—“Human Nature . . . behoves that I know it”—showed him that he could place confidence in this lady. It had nothing to do with her eyes or her outline. It was his Insight.

“I don’t mind telling you.” A slight hitch before the last word showed that the speaker had just avoided italics. He paused a moment, to be quite sure he didn’t mind, then continued: “The original of ‘Ziz’ was my first wife. So far as there *was* an original. But exaggerated out of all—out of all individuality.”

“I never knew that you had been married before.” The wording of this—“never” during the last forty-eight hours!—was ahead of their intimacy, but her hearer accepted it. It chimed in with that luxury of the soul-brush, always at work. He would not on any account have had it exchanged for, “They did not tell me you had been married twice.” Nevertheless, he was unaware that he



was being influenced, and went on towards expansive confidence, unsuspecting of himself.

"I married about fourteen years ago, and lost my wife within a twelvemonth. My son is a big boy now, at Rugby ; he was born just before his mother died. He always thinks and speaks of Marianne as his mother. She has always been a mother to him, in fact. Her own children—we have two little girls—do not realise his half-brotherhood. We have never tried to make them do so."

"How right !" from Judith. Confidence was improving. She was giving sanction to family arrangements.

"Yes, I think it has been best. Their difference of age suggests nothing to them."

"I suppose they know ?"

"Yes—academically, one might say. But knowledge of that is as nothing against the force of a child's acceptance of its *status quo*. When I married Marianne, the boy—he's Bob—was still too young to pay much attention to the fact that she brought him away from his granny's to live at my house. The only difference that impresses him between himself and his sisters is that *he* can remember so much more clearly than they do the house where my first wife and I used to live. It is the house described in "The Spendthrift's Legacy." I shall always believe it was that title that made it so fetching. You see, you can't guess whether the Spendthrift inherited the legacy or bequeathed it. It gets on your brain, and then you ask for it at Mudie's. . . ."

Judith interrupted. "Of course, the Spendthrift *left* the Legacy. But why was he a Spendthrift, one wants to know. . . . Yes, I see. It was a lucky title. But did you always write ?"

"Not until the firm of accountants I was with wound up the affairs of Eatwell and Lushington, the big publishers. I was sent to check and overhaul the stock. An almost unsold novel attracted my attention—an edition of two thousand—fifteen hundred in sheets. Its issue had been arrested by the discovery that the author—who had just died of appendicitis, by-the-bye—had taken another man's title."

"I suppose you can be prosecuted for taking another man's title ?"

"H'm—no! At least, there is no copyright in a title. It wasn't that. It was for the book's own sake. Publishers don't like other people's titles for their books. I was able to offer a suggestion which made it possible to use the sheets. The bound copies were made paper-pulp of again, I believe."

"I can't see much encouragement to authorship in that, Mr. Challis."

"None at all. But Mr. Saxby, who is virtually Eatwell and Lushington—one's dead, and the other has become a missionary in Morocco—saw reason to believe I should succeed as a writer, owing to the new first chapter I wrote for this book to accommodate the new title. He made me write a novel for the firm, and I succeeded."

"But I don't understand. Wasn't the old title printed anywhere on the old sheets?"

"Printed everywhere! The novel was called 'Amaris,' and there were no headlines. The page-tops were just Amaris, Amaris, Amaris all through."

"What is 'Amaris'? And how on earth did you manage?"

"Stop a bit, or I shall want Gargantua's mouth. 'Amaris' was a name the author concocted, like Mrs. Kenwig's 'Morleena.' He wanted to be quite sure his heroine's name had never been used for a novel before, so that he could make it the title. But it *had*, with a Latin subtitle, in which *dulcibus* and *amaris* were put in contrast. . . ."

"Never mind the Latin," said Judith. "What did it mean?"

"It amounted to the question, 'Is Life most full of bitter things or sweet?' and the title answered the question. It might have been called 'Dulcibus' for any light it threw on the problem. But it wouldn't have sold. Nothing sells without a snarl or a howl or a pig-sty in it."

"But I'm so curious to know how you got over the difficulty."

"Simple enough! We turned it into 'Tamarisk.' . . . How? Why, of course, by printing a 'T' at the beginning and a 'K' at the end. It cost something to run the sheets carefully through again, but not so much as burning them."



“What was there about ‘Tamarisk’ in the book?”

“Not a word till I rewrote the first dozen pages. I had to read that blessed book through till I nearly knew it by heart, in order to work out the idea. But it seemed all right when it was done. I was rather proud of it.”

“I dare say it was tremendously clever. But how *was* it done? That’s what I want to know.”

“I made the name of the girl ‘Tamarisk’ instead of ‘Amaris,’ and then her baby brother can’t pronounce it—calls her Amaris; and the family catch the pronunciation, and she adopts the name outright. It was difficult to do, because the conditions implied were those of the bosom of an affectionate family, and the sequel might have clashed. . . .”

“Because . . . ?”

“Well, you see, the girl becomes a Vampire, and sucks the little brother’s blood. But I succeeded. In fact, I think the very difficulties of the situation produced a certain pathos.”

“I see,” said Judith, with a gush of intense perception. “I see that would be so. . . . Yes, that *is* the market-cross, this time.”

Is the gap above large enough to include an inspection of a market-cross, a pump, a camp, and a village church? Perhaps, considering how little was left of the last—though, of course, some of the walls had ancient invisible cores. But hardly for tea at the Rectory, which had to be fresh-made; rather like the church, though in the case of the latter a few of the old leaves were preserved from the first brew, so to speak. Poor old leaves!—poor conscious objects of active conservation, each paroxysm of which left a little less of the flavour of the *moyen age* behind it—a shadow less of excuse for another subscription list on their behalf, or another paper in the Journal of the local Society of Antiquaries. They were being handed down to posterity with such solicitude that whatever of bloom the axe and hammer of Puritanism had left behind seemed like to come off on the gloves of Ecclesiastical Archæology.

Is it necessary to say that the foregoing is only a peep into the ill-regulated mind of Mr. Alfred Challis at about the time that the fresh-made tea at the Rectory had begun to reanimate it? But, of course, Mr. Challis never said a

word to this effect to his host, and that reverend gentleman naturally didn't want to talk about local matters. He was sick of his interesting surroundings, and wanted to hear about the new motor-car and wireless telegraphy and aerostation and coloured photography, and all sorts of things that were up-to-date three years ago, and for that matter are still, to a certain extent. About which and other things the literary gentleman was silent and absent-minded, in spite of the tea. Had he been bound to account to himself for this, he would have found it very difficult to do so. Not being bound, he allowed his mind to recognise the fact that he never did talk much to Parsons—you could never be sure you wouldn't give offence!—and to feel that reserve, short of incivility of course, was plausible at least.

For he was one of those unpractical persons who, never having been thrashed into a Creed in childhood, and being liberally ready to doubt any Creed of his own concoction, associated Religions, broadly speaking, with the opening or closing of shops on Sunday, the suppression of bands in the parks, and the singing of the same tune over and over again in unison at street-corners. When he came by chance on the sound of a harmonium making an unintelligible droning, he conceived of it as Christianity going on in a corner, fraught with a quaint old-world feeling to the passer-by, but scarcely to be encouraged by enlightenment. He had cultivated Ritual so far as to be ready, on emergency, to take off his hat and look intently into it, watching anxiously the while for subsidence of religious symptoms without. At old-fashioned houses, where Prayers might be expected to occur at any moment, he used to become in a sense demoralised, and felt lost when he found himself out of reach of a chair or convenient *prie-Dieu* of some sort. His only really heart-felt expression of gratitude to his own or anyone else's Maker was the "Thank God that's over!" that he didn't say aloud at the end. Messiahs of all ranks, from the highest to the lowest, he regarded as mere bones of contention along interminable sectaries, all ready to fang each other, but kept in check by Scotland Yard. Qualified practitioners of Religion, whether Priest or Presbyter, he looked on as mere survivals of a past age perishing slowly of Civilisation. He was not prepared to take the responsi-



bility of hurrying their extinction, and, indeed, was ready to make concession on minor points, complying in literature with the public conviction that the pronoun standing for the name of the Maker of the Stellar Universe, and possibly others, really ought to be printed with a capital letter. We are merely putting him on record—not hinting at any opinion how far he was right or wrong.

Why do we call Mr. Alfred Challis *unpractical*? it may be asked. Simply because, while he avoided or ignored all experts in Applied Religion, he himself was unprepared with any substitute for it. And this was so even in the case of his own children. He had, however, given *carte blanche*, by implication of supineness, to the partner of his joys, sorrows, and admixtures of the two. He knew perfectly well that if he could have cancelled the little restored church at Royd, and the Parsonage and all its belongings, and left Royd free from what he counted superstition, of a sort, he would have held his hand—simply because he could not for the life of him have suggested any alternative that would not have worked round to the same thing in the end. He was convinced at heart, even while he made mental notes about Clerical Humbugs who pretended to believe what they knew German criticism had exploded long ago—for Mr. Challis had read whatever fostered his predispositions, just like yourself and the present writer—that if this athletic-looking, upright gentleman and his serious sister—for it seemed he was a widower—were to be suddenly removed from Royd, as well as any religious out-scourings of a Dissenting nature hanging about—if all these were cleared away and the village left in charge of the human heart and intellect *etid genus omne*, the human stomach *et istud genus omne* would get their way in double-quick time, and a perfect Saturnalia would come about of Bacchus and Priapus, of Cabiric deformities lurking round the corner for a chance, and Beer. At any rate, he was enough convinced of this to be rather grateful to the Clerical Humbugs for pretending, pending enlightenment. He felt it was benevolent in him to be mean at the cost of his own conscience, and to hold his tongue and leave them undenounced, in the interest of Humanity.

This chronicle has no opinions—note that! The fore-

going is only a peep into the mind of a literary man who was never at a University. Had he been at one, many college-chums in Orders would have checked his condemnations. The man one has read with, swum with, cricketed with—*cannot* be a Hypocrite. Absurd !

Our snapshots of Mr. Alfred Challis's mind have taken long to record, but they serve their turn in this place better, perhaps, than the few trifling incidents of the visit at the Rectory. Consider that the lady and gentleman are on their way back to the Hall, in a golden sunset-light which makes the former resplendent, and does no harm to the appearance of the latter. Judith weighs him more carefully than she has done yet, and the result may be more favourable in such a glow. Quite passable !—is her verdict. And she knows how *she* looks, bless you, reasoning by analogy ! For all her previous verdicts about her companion's looks—so far as they were favourable—have run on lines of intellectual rather than physical beauty.

The reason she looked at him carefully at that moment of starting from the Parsonage may have been because of an impression she had that he had cut a poor figure as against that of the Parson. It had so chanced that Saladin, who had behaved well in the house—accepting small sweet biscuits with reserves as to first approval of them—had, on coming away through the garden, just as they reached the gate, become aware of cats, as an abstraction. Mr. Challis's hold on his collar he hardly took any notice of ; and it was fortunate that the Rev. Athelstan Taylor (that was his name) got hold on the other side just in time to prevent Saladin starting for a concrete cat over the flower-beds. " You had, perhaps, best let me have both sides, Mr. Challis," said he. Then had followed a magnificent contest between the Rev. Athelstan and the boarhound. If the former could have been unfrocked, it would have been a Greek bas-relief. It ended in a draw, as the concrete cat vanished. " I couldn't have held you much longer, old chap," said the Rector unassumingly to Saladin, during apologies and explanations, dogwise. These continued for some time after they had left the Rectory, and Judith was really glad Saladin's chain was on, with no one to help stronger than her literary friend, if a cat occurred.



Rabbits had palled on Saladin, owing to their absurd and unfair practice of running underground.

"He's a fine fellow, your Parson, Miss Arkroyd," said Challis. He acknowledged it readily; athletics were not his line.

"The Reverend Athelstan? (Yes, my darling precious pet, you did quite right, and it was an odious cat!) Oh yes—he was a great athlete in his old Oxford days; was in the 'Varsity eight. (Yes, dear love!—you shall lick when we get home. Now walk quiet, and let people talk.) Yes—he's painfully strong." There was something in this of implied justification for people who were not.

"I'm afraid I'm painfully weak—by comparison. My sedentary employments don't develop the muscles." But, after all, reading prayers and singing of anthems does not, either. This was *in foro conscientiae*—not spoken aloud.

"Oh, everybody can't Sandow. I think that sort of thing rather tiresome, carried too far. However, we are very good friends, the Reverend and I. I like a man that has the courage of his opinions. He's quite in a minority here about the Woman question—or I suppose I should say questions. But I meant the Franchise business particularly. He and the Bishop are at daggers drawn about it. I haven't heard him say much about the other. I fancy, though, he's at heart in favour of it—more than myself, perhaps. I mean the Deceased Wife's Sister Bill."

"Are not you . . . ?" Mr. Challis had a hesitation on him, not like his usual way of speech. That was an amused way usually, a confident one almost always. This was neither.

"I must confess . . ." said Judith hesitatingly—"I must confess to having very little sympathy with men who want to marry their deceased wives' sisters. It's a question of taste, according to me—nothing to do with the high moralities." The implied sneer against all moral law was no discomfort to her hearer. On the contrary, spoken as it was by a good-looking young lady in a sunset light, it seemed to him alike picturesque and liberal. But he changed the conversation suddenly, as though something in it had disagreed with him.

"What a capital photographer the great Athelstan

seems to be !” He said it with a definite air of “Let us talk of something else.” She glanced round at him, decided with some surprise that she had shocked him, but answered without showing it. She was quite a woman of the world, was Judith.

“He’s a splendid photographer. You know he took all those photos for ‘Ten Years of Slum Growth’—my cousin’s book ?” Mr. Challis pretended he knew this book ; but he didn’t. “I made him come and photograph my own special slum population in Tallack Street. But Lady Elizabeth wouldn’t have them in the book. She said Tallack Street could hardly rank as a slum, in her sense of the word.”

“Was it too swell ?”

“She said so. Well !—you shall see the photographs, and judge for yourself.”

But the conversation had fallen flat. A chill had come. Even the discovery that the moon had risen when we were not looking did nothing to remove it. We were not young enough, probably, or not old enough, for lunar influences. Indifference to Phœbe begins with maturity, and even outlasts it. So thought Mr. Challis, when rather mechanically called on to admire the silver disc, shot with gold, just getting clear of a purple gloom that was the hallowed smoke of unholy Grime—hallowed by the sun’s last word to twilight, its heir-at-law and sole executor. For all that, Mr. Challis made notes in this connection for literary purposes, while Judith thought to herself that this would never do. She must make an effort, or the skein she was going to twist round her finger would float away and be lost.

“I know I shocked you just now,” said she.

“Shocked me ?—when ?”

“Just before we got to the photography. . . .”

“I have quite forgotten. What were we saying ?” This was not true ; he remembered perfectly.

“How kind of you to pretend to forget ! Forgive my disbelieving you.”

Challis was open to a recrudescence of veracity. Perhaps it *was* a fib this time—he made the admission. But as he made it, he was again conscious of the soul-brush at work. Had he perceived the skein-analogy, he might have recog-



nised its first clip round the finger. "We were talking of the Deceased Wife's Sister Bill, I think," said he. "But why you think you shocked me I can't imagine."

"Never mind!—if you don't recollect. But Sibyl would have lectured me. She always says I ridicule Moral Law. Perhaps I do, in a certain sense. But Sibyl is the soul of propriety."

"I can't see where ridicule of Moral Law comes in, so far. What you *said* was—well!—amounted to a condemnation of the *taste* of men who wish to marry their wives' sisters. Perhaps I misunderstood?" Challis's manner had a flavour of personal interest; the amused tone had gone, and the last words ended on a pause for an answer, with an intention in them of hearing it and going on. The skein would run on easily from now, said the winder. But not too quick at first.

"Oh no!—quite right," she said. "I meant that. For instance—I shouldn't mention this, only I see you guessed it. You are so quick at guessing things...."

"I'm not. What do you suppose I have guessed?"

"Why—about the Reverend Athelstan, of course, and Elizabeth Caldecott...."

"Elizabeth who?"

"Well—you *saw* her, just now!"

"I thought she was his sister?"

"Oh no!—sister-in-law."

"What were you saying about them—just now? You began 'For instance,' and pulled up...."

"I was going to say theirs was a case in point. If Mr. Taylor wanted to marry Miss Caldecott, I should consider it simply a lapse from good taste on his part. I shouldn't fret over the moralities. He and Bishop Barham would have to fight that out between them.... Oh dear!—what *has* Saladin got? I'm afraid it's a hedgehog. *Do* you think you could keep hold of him, just for a few seconds, while I throw it out of his reach?" This was achieved with difficulty; all the greater from a misconception of the position by Saladin, who thought it was all done for his sake, as a relaxation. The hedgehog was thrown over a long high wall, and Saladin ran along it each way, leaping up at intervals.

“He gets so irritated with hedgehogs, and I don’t wonder, poor darling! I hope he hasn’t strained your hand?” Mr. Challis couldn’t say very much about that. Nothing to speak of! “Let’s go on. He’ll get tired of that, and I don’t hear the bull anywhere—it’s all right. What was I saying?” It is perturbing to the non-bucolic mind to hear a necessary and inevitable bull taken as a matter of course.

“You were speaking of Mr. Taylor and Miss Caldecott. Is he supposed to want to marry her?”

“I really couldn’t say. Men are so odd. Of course, if she were less angular . . .” The young lady blew a whistle for Saladin. The intentness with which both watched for the dog to appear from the quarter he was last seen in enabled him to play off a little joke at their expense. For when Challis turned his head, after much watching and whistling, there was that confounded beast, pretending all the while to wait, after a brief circuit of a mile or so out of sight. He made a pretence of not being able to understand motives, combined with great forbearance in not asking for an explanation of them.

The skein-winding had been a little spoiled, but Judith got it again in order before arriving at the Hall, and it would wait for its opportunity. Her mere acceptance of silence in the twilight of the great avenue, as though conversation-making was not called for under the circumstances, had its force. It might have been spoiled by a quicker pace, to finish the walk up; but, if anything, there was a disposition to loiter, and to hate the idea of being indoors on such a heavenly evening.

“Your wife’s name was . . .?” Surely the subject franked a dropped voice, in harmony with the beauty of the said evening—a touch of tenderness for *its* sake entirely. None but a coarse nature would shout against the musical hushing of the wind in the beeches. Let there be no false note in the chord.

Challis accepted this tenderness as a tribute to the departed. He answered, “Kate—Kate Verrall.” He need have said no more, but it filled out a sympathetic funereal tone, in keeping with the hour, to add: “She died within two years of our first meeting.”



Miss Arkroyd's regret at having raked up a painful memory was so great that she all but laid her hand on her companion's sleeve. "Oh no," she said, still more tenderly, "I did not mean that. I meant Marianne's maiden name." It would have been artificial, and stodgy, too, to call her "your present wife." Better the frankness of a sympathetic nature, and Marianne.

"Craik," was the unqualified answer. Challis wished that his first wife's mother, when she married again, had chosen some one with a more rhythmic name, not to interfere with the general feeling of the foreground and middle distance. For, you see, she then provided this maiden name for the second Mrs. Alfred Challis, whose mother she was also. Mr. Challis had married his deceased wife's half-sister, and would stand condemned—presumably, at least, in the eyes of his companion—for bad taste certainly, possibly worse. He repeated the name, rather crisply, in correction of Judith's first understanding of it as "Blake," but never a word said he, there and then, about Marianne's half-sistership with the original of "Ziz." Was he bound to say anything?

He departed to his room, to dress for dinner, with a disjointed, incomplete feeling that he was rather glad that a mere *au revoir* had involved no handshake. Could he have trusted himself not to emphasize its pressure unduly? Faugh!—where was the sense of such an imbecile speculation, or the need for it? He was angry with himself for the thought—angry at the way he had enjoyed his walk with "that girl." He brushed her off his mind discourteously as "that girl." Why, he had only known her a couple of days! He even found that an impulse of his wanted him to say, "Damn all these people! What are they to me, or I to them, that they should come into my life, and make hay of a working contentment I have never dreamed of questioning?" But he refused to say it, merely noting what its syntax would have been if he had done so. *En revanche*, he made up his mind to write a jolly long letter to Marianne to-night.

The other party—though, indeed, it is hard to say to what—retired to her room to dress, not very sorry to hear that Sibyl was not home yet. She had quite made up her mind

that if her sister talked any nonsense about flirtations with married men, she would speak sharply to her—give her a piece of her mind. But she hated rows. So if the motor-car broke down—and it was pretty sure to—she shouldn't be sorry. In a day or two she was going up to London, and would go straight and call on Mrs. Challis, the Impossible one, and that would put the friendship with her husband on a footing. She would wear that white chiffon and the pearls again this evening, though ; she had looked so well in them last night.

She herself was conscious of no inconsistency in the half-formed thoughts that passed through her mind as she stood before a mirror waiting for her maid to find the white chiffon instead of the black satin ; which Sharratt, the said maid, who had found no male in the company to allot to her mistress, had placed in readiness on speculation. These thoughts can be told, but with a liberal discount. She was not the kind of woman—so they ran—that made mischief in families. That was the fascinating, tender, serpentine, insinuating kind—Becky Sharp, in fact. Intellectual friendship was her *rôle*—influence over men of genius and that sort of thing. Was Challis, as a man of genius, worth practising on ? She thought he might be ; as a lay figure, at any rate, if not for a specific purpose which crossed her mind at the moment. But it was to be stirred aspirations, roused sympathies. He was not the man to be worked on by Vulgar Beauty. All the same, Miss Judith knew what she was going to look like in this mirror when fully draped, when the majestic swoop of skirts should quench the abruptness of the mere petticoat. Till that came, she could fondle her fine arms and say to herself, “ I'm not Becky Sharp, certainly ! But to think of the mischief I could do if I put my mind to it ! ” And then modesty prompted a postscript, “ Or any fairly good-looking woman, for that matter.”

This story has no insight into motives ; it only deals with actions—at least when motives are hard to get at. It is not its concern at present that Judith Arkroyd, splendid in her beauty when she chooses to make the most of it, may have much to learn about her own character—much that she does not suspect herself of. If *she* does not, why should *we* ?



## CHAPTER VII

THE party that assembled that evening to dinner at Royd was smaller than usual, owing to the absence of the motorists, who had not returned. Some of the chits, too—who were never counted ; they were always “ those girls ” or “ the young people ”—had vanished also, taking with them an exactly equal number of male parallel cases ; for they were flirting fair—there was to be no cheating ! Thus it came about that the ladies’ procession to the drawing-room did not make up to half-a-dozen, and the men they left behind to smoke only just did so. But then, it was easier to talk, because there was less noise.

Scarcely had the last inch of the last lady, regarded as a total with all components included, disappeared through the door, when Mr. Challis’s two friends of the morning made a simultaneous rush for a chair on either side of him. He succumbed, having no alternative, but resolved to pay absolutely no attention to anything they said. He would throw his whole soul into the enjoyment of the cigar he foresaw. There it was—in a box of ivory and *madreperla* which Sibyl had somehow countenanced into existence, without doing anything to it herself—being brought along in a tray, abetted by cigarettes. But he would light it when he had drunk his coffee, thank you ! The fact was, Mr. Challis was acquiring presence of mind, and did not spoil his opportunities now as he used to do formerly when the world of toffs was new.

Mr. Brownrigg the Grauboschite would not detain Mr. Challis more than one moment from Mr. Wraxall, the Universal Insurer ; no more, in fact, than was necessary for him to emphasize a consideration he had alluded to in the morning. But he might take this opportunity of pointing out one or two inevitable inferences from that consideration which might not have occurred to his hearer.

He was better than his word, for he pointed out half-a-dozen at least. He then went on to say that it was only fair on his part to admit the plausibility of three or four exceptions that he was well aware had been taken to those inferences. But he was prepared to demonstrate the fallacy of each of these on many different grounds, the least of which would be fatal to the pretensions of his opponents' arguments in more than one particular.

If he had stopped there, Mr. Triptolemus Wraxall would have got in and scored ; and, indeed, double-wicket would have been quite possible if Mr. Brownrigg would have played according to rule. But he wouldn't. Mr. Wraxall struggled to get a hit and a run, but scarcely succeeded.

As, with the exception of Challis and one or two others who listened and looked superior, everyone at the table became a contributor of a vigorous analysis, an irrefutable demonstration, an exhaustive enumeration, a thoughtful review, an indignant protest, or a brief summary of essential facts, or was laying stress upon an important point that might easily be lost sight of, there was a great deal of noise. Challis nearly succeeded, by a powerful effort, in abstracting his mind from it and enjoying his cigar. He was able to believe that he only resorted to a speculation as to what was going on in the drawing-room as an assistance against all this chatter. That speculation had certainly nothing to do with any particular young lady whatever.

But a drowsy semi-abstraction was only achievable when the components of the Chaos were so numerous as to neutralise each other, becoming a sustained inarticulate roar. The moment a single speaker, or even two, became audible in an oasis of silence, Challis's attention was caught by his words, and divided fairly between them and what was left of the reveries they intruded on. Such an oasis was reached as far as Challis's immediate neighbours were concerned about half-way through his cigar, just as regret began to set in that he had smoked so much of it.

Now it happened that Mr. Ramsey Tomes, who was quite unexhausted, though he had talked all day, and who was seated on the other side of the table, had at that moment just sketched the extinction of the British Empire in conse-



quence of its ill-advised persistence in all the *dementiæ* of all the States that *Deus* ever *voluit perdere*. He had used up his Latin quotations, including the one we have taken a liberty with, and had finished with a beautiful picture of the New Zealander, our old friend, gazing across the site of vanished London from Jack Straw's Castle, and murmuring to himself, "*Perierunt etiam ruinæ*." Happy in his peroration, the orator sat sustaining a fat right foot on a fat left knee with a fat left hand. His fat right thumb and forefinger held a permanent glass of port; they seemed to be waiting for it to evaporate. His attitude was unfavourable to his figure, as it laid too much stress on a corporate capacity which might have been described as pendant. But the *ensemble* was majestic, as he fixed his small but piercing eye on the cornice of the room opposite, grasping the eyeglass that accompanied it with what almost seemed a materialised allusion to his own powerful grasp of political issues. So sitting, his appearance was that of a Mind, giving attentive consideration to most things.

"The disciple of Socrates," said he, with a decision and suddenness that compelled respectful attention, "turns with satisfaction from the contemplation of a spectacle that might well arrest the orgies of an Epicurus, or soften the cynicism of a Diogenes, to the fields in which Speculation, untrammelled by official responsibility, deposits—if I may be permitted the simile—the eggs from which will emerge (like Minerva from the brain of Jove) the fully-fledged Politician of the future."

Here an expression of discontent from a young Lieutenant, whose chit was in the drawing-room awaiting his release, distracted Challis's attention for the moment. A word of sympathy elicited from this youth that he had a private grievance against Mr. Tomes. "*You* wouldn't like it any more than I do, if he had trod on *your* pup. Poor little beggar's only a month old!" He brooded over this injury in silence, and the orator again became audible. He seemed to have been digressing.

"I will pursue this aspect of the case no further, but will return to the subject in hand. It is not, I hope, necessary for me to say, at this table, that I am not one of that group of indiscriminate Thinkers who are prepared to welcome the

germination of the Political Idea in the crude brain of every Sciolist. The outcome of such a surrounding is but too apt to out-Herod Herod. The *medio tutissimus ibis*, the *procellas cautus horrescis* that we may suppose to have guided Cæsar's wife, should also serve as a beacon to those whose ambition it is to deserve the gratitude of posterity." Challis was enjoying the cigar too much to ask—"Why Cæsar's wife?"

Mr. Tomes's assumption of his right to the rostrum was so forcible as scarcely to allow of usurpation while he was visibly bolting an *ad interim* glass of port with a view to going on again. Mr. Brownrigg chafed, and Mr. Wraxall stood himself over in despair. The young Lieutenant murmured a prayer to any Providence that would shape the end of Mr. Tomes's speech, and help him on to it. There seemed no hope. So he thought of the chit's teeth and chin in self-defence. Mr. Tomes swallowed his glass of port with a clear conscience about its non-evaporation—had he not given it every opportunity?—and resumed:

"I must not, however, allow myself to be led away. . . ." But he had to pause a few seconds, to remember something to have been led away by. Feeling uncertain, he repeated: "I must not allow myself to be led away by a side-topic, however fascinating. The maturity of Political Thought claims our attention. Whether we contemplate the vast areas of controversy laid bare to the scalpel of the Political Analyst in connection with the aspirations of the Socialist pure and simple, the Anarchist pure and simple, or the Nihilist pure and simple, or differentiate by a closer scrutiny. the theories of the Socialist-Anarchist, the Socialist-Nihilist, or the Nihilist-Anarchist, we are driven irresistibly to the same conclusion—that Omniscience is still in its infancy. There is one element which all schemes for the Readjustment of the Universe have in common—namely, that each differs on some vital point from the whole of its neighbours. Do not let us be discouraged by this. Let us rather be content to infer from it the dangers that await those who advocate rash departures from the existing order of things, and to recognise, in the discrepancies attendant on the consolidations of Political Opinion in the thousand and one groups into which it crystallizes, the indisputable



fact that the Index-finger of the Political Horizon is the maintenance of the *status quo*. I trust I make myself clearly understood."

Mr. Tomes did not mean to stop for some time yet, but breath was necessary to him, as to others, and he had got blown over those groups that crystallized. He knew that his last words would make all his hearers speak at once, and they did. In the Chaos of their joint remark was concealed a statement apiece that Mr. Tomes had most lucidly expounded the one great object of each one's several scheme, and that the existing order of things would remain thereby much more truly the same—would have a much more heart-felt identity than any mere banal and Philistine letting-alone could confer upon it. The choral character of the performance made the warning check of Mr. Tomes's outspread hand plausible.

"Pardon me one moment," said he, with recovered breath. "The point I wish to lay stress upon is this: While the compass of the Political Mariner points incontestably to the dangers of quitting a safe anchorage, the Voice of Enlightenment enjoins that all new schemes of a subversive nature should be looked at on their merits, and rejected on their merits. This is what I understand by an Enlightened Conservatism. Rejection without examination is the programme of the Mere Bigot. I am sure Sir Murgatroyd will appreciate my meaning."

Sir Murgatroyd, thus appealed to, seized his opportunity, and dexterously annexed the rostrum. He contrived to embark on a trip through the pamphlet he had written, which claimed for William the Conqueror the position of the earliest pioneer of Socialism.

Just as he was within a measurable distance of his demonstration that the Feudal System contained in itself solutions of all difficulties such as the present age meets by propounding a huge variety of remedies and calling them all Socialism, noises of arrival interrupted him, and were followed by an incursion of the motorists, very tired and greedy, after a delay due to civilisation, which prescribes soap and water before meals, and a curb on one's impatience till the said meals can be laid on the table. The absence of snorts without occasioned remark, and compelled a grudging

disclosure that the last time the motor broke down nothing could bring it to the scratch again ; and it had been left behind ten miles off, the party having come home on a mean hired vehicle. Their faith that this breakdown was abnormal and exceptional, and a typical example of the sort of thing that never occurs again, was touching and beautiful.

Mr. Triptolemus Wraxall was glad of the interruption. He had not asserted himself, and felt that he was a mistake, in that society. His forms of thought were more studious and reflective—sounder altogether ! One feels this when one has not asserted oneself, and bounced.

Mr. Brownrigg was sorry. He had made up his mind to point out something, but had not quite made up his mind what it was to be ; merely that it would redound to the credit of Graubosch. Why should not he point out, and venture to call your attention to, like other people ? However, the others were the losers.

Mr. Challis and the young Lieutenant were both very glad, but with a difference. The former thought fit, for some reason, to represent to his conscience that his gladness was due to a release from intolerable boredom, and certainly had nothing to do with any young woman in the drawing-room. The latter made no bones about it, but simply ran, the moment the excuse came. Even so would the little beggar Mr. Tomes trod on have gone for a saucer of milk.

Challis passed the young soldier on the landing, he having found his chit on the bottom stair of the next flight, devoting herself to the little beggar, who had not been welcomed in the drawing-room, owing to human prejudices. The chit had been so bored in the absence of her counter-chit, as the Lieutenant might be called, that she had found it necessary to send for Cerberus. That was the little beggar's baptismal name. Challis passed on into the drawing-room, breathing a prayer that all would be well. What his foreboding was we do not know.

He thought it necessary to deny his own accusation against himself that he had been pleased at the Lieutenant running on in front of him to join the ladies first, that he



might thereby seem even-minded on the question of his own anxiety to do so. He denied it, and to satisfy himself of the strength of his position, walked in indifferently. He emphasized his denial by spending no more than a remark or two on Lady Arkroyd, who, he thought, showed a lack of her usual cordiality, as though she had read a disparaging review. He inquired a little whether she found the ride to Thanet pleasant, and so on; and then went at once to the other end of her daughter's sofa—not a very long one. Indeed, he could hardly do otherwise, as Judith certainly transferred her fine eyes from him to its vacant corner-cushion. He was a little nettled at finding he wanted an excuse for his alacrity.

We have read in some novel that the reason women are so fond of unprincipled men is that they know the latter can and will enjoy their society thoroughly, and never vex their souls with any questions as to what that society may mean or lead to for either of them. They, the women, will do the drawing the line, and that sort of thing. Why be prigs? Now Challis was scarcely a prig, and he was certainly not an unprincipled man. If he had been the one, he would have thought much more talk necessary with the mother before monopolizing the daughter; if the other, his choice of a satisfaction would have been as candid as his young soldier's had been—as the little beggar's always was. Whether the authoress of this novel was talking wisely or not, who shall say? Broadly speaking, profligates are better company than prigs. *Cæteris paribus*, mind you!

This is all by the way; will very likely be deleted before this present writing goes to press. Miss Arkroyd was certainly not under any necessity to speculate on the matter. *She* knew perfectly well that Mr. Challis, married man or no, was going to anchor at the far end of her sofa as soon as he had got through that silly pretence of chatting with her mother. And she had retired from a colloquy with this same mother—whose influence was not strong over her, and with whom something had disagreed, she thought—with that end in view. Sibyl wasn't there, with her nonsense, and she should do as she liked. Nay, more!—she would at once say something to show her independence of Sibyl's nonsense.

“ We thought you were never coming up.” She decided to make it *we*, not *I*, on the whole. Challis’s vanity suspected the substitution, recognising in it a maiden-of-the-world’s prudence, and applauded it. But a recollection of what a letter he was going to write to Marianne prompted a protest. He couldn’t afford to enjoy his position too much, without loss of self-respect. How important one’s self-respect is !

“ We were having some very interesting talk about Politics. Your brother and sister and Lord Felixthorpe came back and interrupted it.” There was great detachment in this, but it was overdone ; too much like “ pointing out ” to a polypus that his tentacles were slipping.

Ought her response, thought Judith, to show pique at her quarry’s independence—at his contentment to be away from her society ? Much too soon !—was her verdict, passed, but not formulated. It would be just like a girl in her first season. And she had not known this man much above forty-eight hours. She was not going to behave like that child in the passage, whose pretty sing-song voice chimed with her young soldier’s outside when Challis opened the door to come in just now. Judith felt certain what she was saying was “ I was so saw-ry for you having to talk Pawlitics when you might have been up here with me and this dahling pup.” Her imagination committed itself to the words, musical drawl and all ; but negatived this sort of thing in her own case.

“ I should like to have been there to hear it,” she said. “ What were they talking about ? The usual thing, I suppose ? ”

Challis felt she was an honourable polypus, in whose tentacles he could trust himself. “ I can’t say,” said he. “ I’m too recent to know what is or isn’t usual. You’ll hear the supplement immediately. There they are, coming upstairs ! ”

The lady remained silent, listening handsomely. The thought in Challis’s mind—to the effect that she was the antipodes of Marianne, in looks—was so irrelevant and inappropriate that he gave it notice to quit, incontinently. But he could not serve the notice without admitting possession. He could, though, as a *per contra*, do a little



mechanical forecasting of his letter to Marianne. Yes—his course was clear ; he would tell his wife how absurdly unlike her in all respects this queenly young woman was ; might even go the length of wondering how the partner of *her* joys and sorrows would be able to live with so much dignity always taking place in his neighbourhood. Would that be like reminding Marianne of her homeliness, though ? Oh no !—*he* would take care of that. Still, if Marianne had been just one shade less homely, it would have been easier. Never mind !

The voices on the stairs gathered audibility. Oh yes !—there was papa and the Feudal System. Judith could hear that, plain enough. How sick she was of William the Conqueror ! And Mr. Tomes, of course, just as usual ! But we mustn't speak too loud, or Mrs. Tomes would hear. What a fool that woman was ! But Mr. Challis didn't know her. He must do so, in the interests of his next book. All which, in a voice dropped to confidence-point, tended to engage Mr. Challis's cogs—the simile is an engineering one—in Miss Arkroyd's wheel.

What was that Mr. Tomes was saying ? Something or other was to be relegated to the Limbo of departed something-elses. If only those young people wouldn't make such a noise with the puppy, we should hear ! Why were things always relegated to Limbos, and why was nothing ever sent to Limbos except by relegation ? The question was Challis's. But he was talking at random, for reasons. So was Judith, perhaps, when she said absently : “ I have noticed that, too.” She was listening carefully to hear if her sister and her co-motorists were following. “ I suppose they all came in famished,” she added.

“ Didn't you see them when they came in ?”

“ I heard them.”

“ Didn't they sound famished ?”

“ Not especially. I didn't pay much attention. As long as no bones are broken. . . . They won't be coming up for some time yet.” There was in her voice a very clear implication of relief. The inference was that we, in this sofa-haven, should not be disturbed. Its correctness was soon manifest. No two oratorically-disposed gentlemen, well wound up, ever disturb a chat in a corner, further than

mere shouting goes. And Sir Murgatroyd and the sitting member for Grime were wound up to a high pitch of agreement about what constituted an Enlightened Conservatism, and each was anxious to supply the next link in the chain of Syllogism, and get the credit of it. So they shouted against each other all the way upstairs, and only lulled very slightly when they reached the drawing-room.

Mr. Brownrigg and Mr. Wraxall, on the other hand, were *aux grands éprises* on a vital question—never mind what ; nobody knew or cared !—which underlay the whole of their argument. Mr. Wraxall had been unable to permit an inference of Mr. Brownrigg's to pass unchallenged, and Mr. Brownrigg had impugned the data on which Mr. Wraxall's objections were founded. Mr. Wraxall had replied that something or other had been clearly laid down as a safe principle by Baker, and Mr. Brownrigg had pointed out that the fallacy of Baker's assumptions had been exhaustively dealt with by Smith. Mr. Wraxall had counter-pointed out that Smith's penetrating insight into everything else had led him into error in this one particular ; and had laid stress upon the fact that Hopkins, the weight of whose opinion it was impossible to deny, had endorsed the opinions of Baker. Mr. Brownrigg had then become patronising, and went so far as to warn Mr. Wraxall not to be led away by the plausibility of Hopkins. Who then, being a weak controversialist, had rashly appealed to Mr. Ramsey Tomes to countenance the authority of Hopkins. But that gentleman only gave a weighty shake to a judicial head, claiming at once profound thought in the past, and forecasting just censure to come. He feared that the insidious ratiocinations of Hopkins were a rock we all split upon in the forest of youth, and an *ignis fatuus* to mislead the mariner in the ocean of dialectical difficulty that chequered our steps in later life.

The controversy, of which the foregoing is a condensation, had passed the quarrelsome point when the disputants arrived in the drawing-room, shutting out the melodious trill of the chit, the squeaks of the little beggar, and the lieutenant's bass voice, saying, " He and the kitten were having a high old time with my boots early this morning." The argument was in the mutual-amends stage, and Mr.



Brownrigg was enlarging on the enthralling and irresistible fascination of Hopkins's style, while Mr. Wraxall was equally eloquent on the almost Nicholsonian vigour and expansiveness of Smith's. They were then separated, and presently the insurer was audible afar, enlarging to Lady Arkroyd on a scheme for insuring against damage at the Wash, in which she was much interested ; while the Grauboschite was mentioning some further details of that great man's system to Mrs. Ramsey Tomes. Who, however, only said : " I think my husband would like to hear that," or " Have you mentioned that to Mr. Tomes ?" but gave no sign of receiving, or of ever having in her life received, an idea on her own account. The Baronet and the M.P. simply went on, like the water coming in when the ballcock has stuck, and nobody will be at work till Monday.

But is this fair to the reader ?—to go on inflicting on him irrelevant chatter merely to justify Judith's feeling that in the security of that sofa-haven she could safely carry on the skein-twisting a little prematurely—that is, without waiting for a visiting acquaintance with the probably plebeian wife, to put her friendship with the husband on an ascertained footing. Now Judith was not without a well-defined motive for the skein-twisting, as was hinted at the end of our last chapter. We rather think that if she had not been she would have suspected something abnormal in Challis's matrimonies from his manner when he said " Craik." Women are as sharp as all that—oh dear, yes !

After a little discursive chat to make sure that no floating interruption would desert the other group-units and bear down on their haven, Judith was seized with a sudden intense apprehension that Mr. Challis could write a tragedy. She can have had very slight grounds for this conclusion ; she had almost no knowledge of that author's work, as we have seen. But she relied on his vanity to make him take an easy-going view of any claims she had to pronounce him Shakespeare. Pleasing verdicts soothe the cavils of incredulous modesty, and suggest unsuspected data in the bush. But he was bound to make some sort of protest. It would never do to say he rather thought he could.

"What makes you think that?" he said.

"I can't say. It has nothing to do with anything I have read of yours. I think it is something in yourself makes me think so." It was as well to head off any discussion of what she had read; and an ounce of personality is worth a ton of mere evasion. The fine eyes examined Mr. Challis's intelligent brow carefully to see what it was in himself that made their owner think so. His own watched them as though expecting their conclusion would be registered shortly.

"I have written a couple of comedies," said he, to help. "But no tragedy, so far." And from thence a certain reality crept into the conversation, which up to that moment had been rather words for words' sake, or, perhaps it should be said, for their speaker's sake. For so much talk that sets up to be interchange of ideas is uttered to convince the speakers they are conversing, and to make them plausible to themselves and each other.

"You *have* written for the stage, then. That is what I meant. Have you had anything performed yet? Forgive my not knowing."

"There is nothing to know that you could have known. One of the comedies, 'Aminta Torrington,' is to come out after Christmas. The other, 'Widow's Island,' is on the shelf. Nobody appreciates it."

"Do you see a great deal of theatrical people?" Now, Challis had wanted the eyes to be interested about his plays—to abet the speaker in a curiosity she ought to have felt. But no matter: that would wait.

"I see a great many. What makes you ask in such an interested way?"

"Because I want to know. I have a reason. I'll tell you sometime." Whereat the mercury in the thermometer of this lady and gentleman's intimacy went up a degree distinctly. So much was implied in the word "sometime." Not very easy to summarise, certainly—but *there*, all the same! It ratified anticipation of future intercommunications, on the surface of it. Also, it hinted at confidences to come. But let us be just to Judith here. She never meant it as another wind of the skein. She was honestly unconscious this time, thinking frankly of



an interest of her own. She continued: "Tell me a good deal about them. Why doesn't one know more of them?"

"I didn't know one didn't. That's nonsense, or sounds very like it. But we know what we mean. I'll state it clearly, to save trouble. The question is, Why do swell young women that are presented at Court, and go to balls in the season, and sit in carriages at Ascot, and see polo-matches at Hurlingham, and get married at St. George's, Hanover Square . . . is that right so far? . . ."

"That will do very well, at any rate." Judith said this without a laugh, where there might have been one. "Go on, Mr. Challis."

"Why does this sort of young woman not meet more actresses and actors in the society she lives in? Well, I can tell you the answer—at least, I can tell you my opinion, if you ask it."

"Yes, I do. What is it?"

"They are always at the play, the actors and actresses, either on the stage or in the boxes. Or the pit. Or the gallery. I can't answer for the whole profession. But that's my experience."

"I have always been told they were so disreputable. Are they?"

"My dear Miss Arkroyd, what a very old-fashioned idea!" Challis laughed outright. "No!—they are just like everybody else as to manners and morals, and that sort of thing. They are not monks and nuns, certainly. But such a many folk are not that."

Judith looked at him doubtfully. Was not that rather the way men sometimes talk, throwing dust in the eyes that want to distinguish right from wrong? Monks and nuns, as we all know, are people that want to deprive you and me of cakes and ale. But what is meant by cakes and ale? She would push a test question home. If Mr. Challis had a grown-up daughter, she asked, would he let her go on the stage, if she wished it very much, and had a turn for it? Of course he would, was his answer, without hesitation. Why should he not? This seemed to decide Judith on an extension of confidence.

"I will tell you why I am asking. I know a girl . . .

well ! I should say *woman* . . . who wants to go on the stage. But it seems impossible. What her capabilities would be I cannot say. But it seems hard that she should be unable to give them a trial."

"Why cannot she?"

"Her family oppose it ; or rather, she knows they would oppose it if the proposal took form. At present she only knows that they treat the idea with derision—as something hardly worth ridicule."

"But why ?—if she has it at heart."

"Respectability. Position. Balls in the season. Carriages at Ascot. St. George's, Hanover Square. Family, in short !"

"Tell me more about this friend. *Why* does she suppose she has qualifications ? She must have had *some* experience to convince her ?"

Judith stopped to consider a few seconds. "Yes, I can tell you that," she said. "She played in the 'Antigone' a couple of years ago. You know my brother and his friends played it in London, and got the female parts played by women. Of course, at Cambridge it was the boys themselves."

"Did you think her performance good ?"

Judith sticks a little over her answer, but it comes. "Not perfectly satisfactory—not to me, at least. But everyone else spoke so well of it that I may have been mistaken."

"Yet you would encourage her to make a very hazardous experiment, and to incur the displeasure of her family, on the strength of no more than what you now tell me. Do allow me to say that your friend ought to have more experience . . ."

"She ought to keep out of the water till she can swim," Judith struck in. "I know the sort of thing. What people always say ! But can you wonder that she thinks it hard that she isn't allowed to go in at the shallow end of a swimming-bath ; and all because of the merest Mrs. Grundy ?"

"Not quite the merest Mrs. Grundy. Moderately mere, suppose we say ! The actress who fails is in a sorry plight . . ."

"She *wouldn't* fail." Judith interrupted again, a little



impatiently. "At least—I mean—she wouldn't fail altogether. But, of course, she would take her chance of that. Why should she not try, if she chooses to run the risk?"

Challis was watching her image in a mirror as she said this, and thought he saw a blush-rose tinge creeping over the cheek. Surely she was taking this friend's case very much to heart. An idea crossed his mind, and he schemed a test of its truth—a question he would ask.

"Is she beautiful? That would help matters."

The eyes in the mirror turned, and Challis had to withdraw his own suddenly. You know how one feels *caught*, when a reflection in a glass suddenly transfixes one? It is like conviction of treachery—quite unlike the direct transaction analogous to it. But he need not have been so conscious; as he saw, when a furtive glance back showed him that the reflection was not looking at *him*, but at Miss Arkroyd, at her corner of the sofa.

"Beauty is so much a matter of opinion," said she. "No doubt she herself is convinced her allowance of it is enough for working purposes." She stopped a moment, listening to sounds approaching—the motor-party audible on the stairs. Then, as she began to get up from the sofa, she said quickly, "If you think you can be of any use to her—with introductions and so on—I will tell you who she is. Sometime; not now. There they are!" The interview was at an end, and Challis prepared to merge in a world he was sure would be less interesting. However, he felt some curiosity to hear the tale of the motor disaster.

## CHAPTER VIII

THE chit and her young officer felt unequal to remaining outside, against the tidal wave of the returned motorists. Occasional suspension is necessary to the greediest flirtation, to give it a flavour of stolenness ; else it loses its character, and palls. This is our surmise as to why these young people allowed themselves to be swept into the drawing-room by the current. Cerberus seemed to have been withdrawn. It is not necessary to the story to know whether the little beggar had or had not disappointed his backers. No questions were asked.

The way in which the motor-party ignored their accident was more like the concerted vigour of artillerymen in charge of a gun than any mere philosophical submission to the will of Fate. Practically the machine's twenty-horsepower had brought them in triumph to the door exactly at the time appointed. A trivial excursion into non-fulfilment of its destiny was not the poor motor's fault, nor its inventor's, nor its maker's, nor its *chauffeur's*. It was all due to a little bit of original sin in the heart of a hexagon nut, which, having heard that the only key that it could be got at with was mislaid, immediately went slack. It resisted the importunities of a screw-hammer, and demanded a box-key. Like some minute organism of humanity—a spiteful *medulla oblongata*, say!—endowed with powers of striking work, it had paralysed the whole structure. But, unlike the *medulla oblongata*, it could be set right in five minutes as soon as we had a proper box-key. Therefore it was as clear as noonday that the mishap, as an incident in the History of Motoring, hadn't happened at all. It was by-play—didn't count!

The expedition had been a great success. Its object had been attained ; like that of the scout who locates the enemy, but leaves his horse behind. When you have seen



premises that are the very thing, what does it matter how you get home? For the purposes of the Great Idea, these premises were the very thing. Three large waterwheels, one overshot, ninety-four-horse-power in all, and the most glorious oak- and beechwoods coming down to the water-side. And the most interesting fourteenth-century pound William Rufus had ever seen. He and his friend Scipio were fascinated with the place, and enthusiastic about the Great Idea. But while apt to feel pique at any doubt thrown on the wisdom of the scheme, the latter was not prepared to forego the luxury of making fun of it himself.

“No historical associations,” said he, with perfect deliberation of manner, “could supply a more healthy stimulus to the production of what I believe are called Art Objects. The church, a most interesting example of several styles, has been judiciously restored in one—I forget which—and the castle, some portions of which are previous to something very early—I forget what——”

“Suppose you shut up, Scip,” said his friend. “You’re never in earnest about anything. No—it really is the most delightful place I’ve ever seen. You wouldn’t look so scornful if you could see it, Ju. And as for its suitability, I don’t see how there can be any question about that.”

His sister Sibyl’s practical mind—her manner laid claim to one—went straight on to details. “The only thing,” she said, “that I didn’t see a place for was the ivory carver’s shop.”

“Couldn’t one of those places in the roof be converted?” her brother asked.

“Too hot in the summer,” said Sibyl decisively. “I can see the weaving-sheds, and the jewellery-shops, and the bookbinder’s department, and the printing-house, and the woodblock-cutter’s little shop round by the stairs, and the ceramic works—(only we really must be sure that chimney-shaft will be any good)—and the bronze-casters, and the printed fabrics, and the type-writing *de luxe* for private circulation.” She checked off each department on her fingers, imagining clearly—so Mr. Challis, who was watching her, thought—the place in which it was to be located. Then she came to her exception—“But where

on earth those tiresome ivory carvers are to be put I can't imagine !”

Her brother, with perfect gravity, accepted the difficulty as one to be wrestled with. “ I don't see why they need be downstairs at all,” said he. “ Why not put them in—well !—if not in the roof, why not in that room beyond the Art-needlework schools ?”

“ We can't conveniently have boys and young men passing and repassing.” Sibyl was giving it serious thought ; no doubt of that ! She added with conviction : “ We shall have to build in the end ; so we may as well look the matter in the face.”

“ What do you want with ivory-carvers ?” Thus Judith, with a near approach to a yawn. It never came off, owing to good breeding ; but Mr. Challis noted to himself that it would have been statuesque had it done so. Marianne's yawn was not statuesque. He could recall cases in point. . . . What had that to do with the matter, by-the-bye ? Challis brushed it away by joining in a murmur of half-protest against Judith's question. The world was listening interested to the evolution of the Great Idea. Politics had slacked down—to give it a turn. And the world perceived, in a doubt thrown on the necessity for ivory-carving, a dangerous phase of criticism that might undermine the whole scheme.

Sibyl said, with decisive resignation, “ Oh dear !—how exactly like you that is, Ju !” And her brother, “ That's Judith all over.” Then both asked a mixed question, equivalent to—If not ivory-carvers, why not not anything ? Why not no jewellery ?—no art needlework ?—no hammered metal or wood-carving ? The world's murmur of half-protest—so Challis thought—had really less to do with the demerits of the cavil it condemned than with the obviousness of the answer to it. A mob is apt to mistake its self-gratulation at having perceived something for agreement with the thing it has perceived. Folk sing below par in unison, and no one cares much which way he votes in a *plebiscite*. This is what Mr. Challis thought, not a remark of the text. He resolved to put it in his next book.

“ I am in a minority.” Judith dropped her fine eyelids with a hint in the action of formal surrender, as one strikes



a banner. "Even Mr. Challis has deserted me!" Challis said, "Not altogether. I'm a trimmer playing fast and loose. A sort of plaid, like Sam Weller." But he had not understood his *monde*. It was one that knew nothing about Sam Weller.

The rest of the company—all but the chit and counter-chit—showed a disposition to talk to each other of conditions necessary to be observed in the sudden inauguration of complex undertakings, these conditions touching points familiar to the speaker, but not within the experience of others. Each would call Mr. Arkroyd's attention to a danger ahead, or an advantage to be attained by well-advised foresight, as early as possible to-morrow, so that Opportunity might be taken by the forelock.

Mr. Ramsey Tomes enjoined caution before all things. He spoke as one having a monopoly of prudent instincts, to the exclusion of a rash planetful of fellow-creatures, or as the voice of one crying "Beware!" in the wilderness of pitfalls Don't-care neglected, with such fatal consequences. He suggested, like the father of him who slew the Jabberwock, that he who only took sufficient heed was certain of success—need not make any positive efforts—could go on rather better without them. One would have thought he meant—Mr. Challis *did* think—that any commentator so cautious as never to open a volume was well half-way to a triumph of exegesis, and that Columbus would have discovered America all the quicker if he had stopped at home. The story, Mr. Tomes concluded, of the failure of the plethora of rash enterprises that were our inheritance from an otherwise glorious Past would fill a volume. Mr. Challis thought to himself that this was unworthy of its author—rather an anticlimax. But Mr. Tomes was sleepy.

In fact, it was getting late, and a sense of impending adjournment was vitiating the discussion: a little pitted speck in the garnered fruits of its intelligence was growing, and a period of sleepy incapacity was in sight. Winding-up remarks became frequent, such as "We shall have to think all that over," or "We must settle this, that, and the other first, before anything practical can be done," or "One thing's certain, at any rate"—this last being the prelude to several different conclusions. In the end the view that

we might sleep upon it was welcomed as an epigrammatic truth, and acted on. The company broke up, finding their bedroom-candles in the passage.

And as the chit and the counterchit tore themselves apart till morning, the latter said to the former, "What was all the fun? Did you make out?" To which the chit replied simply, "I wawesn't listening," in a long sweet drawl. And to that young officer's ears—will you believe it?—these words seemed the embodiment of divine wisdom, and he remained intoxicated!

Miss Sibyl Arkroyd, although she had just professed herself utterly worn out with her hard afternoon's work, was not too tired to say to her sister, over the lighting of a bedroom candle in the passage, "Come into my room; I've something to say to you."

Judith, majestically undisturbed at anything a younger sister can possibly have to say, is in no hurry to comply with this request or mandate. Rather, she is inclined to make a parade of deliberation, exchanging understandings with Mr. Challis over the heads of the group of males with whom he is retiring to the smoking-room, to end the day with a cigar. Secret reciprocities seem to have set in, thinks Sibyl, pausing on the landing above, out of sight. And these are too subtle for the vernacular guests, and outclass the counterchits altogether. Though, as each of these last is dwelling contentedly on his recent chit, that doesn't come into court.

But Sibyl is wary, and gets away in time to her room. She just hears her sister's farewell speech to the author: "Do consider your readers a little, Mr. Challis, and don't ruin your brains with too many cigars," and his answer: "It all depends on the quality of the baccy;" followed by a testimonial from William Rufus about the brand of the one Challis has just chosen; and then she ends a majestic ascent of the broad stairway, with the portraits of departed Arkroyds looking down from its wainscoted walls, by disappearing into her sister's room.

"What's the something, Sibyl?"

"You'll be angry if I tell you."

"I may." Judith keeps her candle in her hand. Is it



worth putting it down, if dissension in the wind is pointing to a short interview ? " But how can I tell till I know ? Why did you want me ?"

" Well—I'll tell you. But you mustn't fly into a rage. That man Mr. Scoop—or Harris, or whatever his name is—married his Deceased Wife's Sister !"

" Is that any concern of mine ?"

" You wouldn't speak in that way if it weren't."

" In what way ?"

" The way you spoke." What may seem inexplicable here is due to the inability of mere words to do justice to the intensity of Judith's unconcern. There was no need for an indifference such as a humming-top asleep shows to the history of its own time.

" I don't mind waiting till you are reasonable, Sib dear." This little bit of Prussian tactics improved Judith's position. She put her candlestick on a piece of real Chippendale, to express anchorage, but remained standing. She had been looking very handsome in the white chiffon all the evening, and thought so. Her subconscious judgment confirmed this, as a mirror on a wardrobe-door swung her reflection before her for a moment. Sibyl had opened it. Judith looked at her wrist-watch as she stood, but meant, subconsciously, to look up again when the counterswing brought the image back. All which occurred, and then Sibyl sat against the bed-end, having disposed of the wardrobe, and said :

" You know you have been in Mr. Harris's company all day, Judith. And I suppose it's going to be the usual thing. But there's no sense in your calling me unreasonable simply because I want you to know what the position is."

" What *is* the position ?"

" Just what I've told you. Mr. Harris . . . well—Challis then . . . is not really a married man. He married—at least, made believe to marry—his Deceased Wife's Sister."

" Then, now you've told me what the position is, I know. And I may go to bed."

" Don't be irritating, Judith." It *is* provoking, you know, when your enemy makes a successful rally after a seeming repulse. Judith's last tactical move was masterly. Her success soothed her to moderation.

"I don't want to be irritating, Sib. And I don't think you have any right to talk of being irritating after what you said just now. '*The usual thing!*' What usual thing?"

"You know what I mean, and it doesn't matter."

"I don't think it matters the least. But what do you know about Mr. Challis? I mean, what do you know that I don't?"

"Only what I told you."

"But how do you know? Really, Sibyl, I shall go if there are to be any more mysteries."

"Well, don't be impatient, and I'll tell you." And thereon Sibyl, seated on the end of the bed, gave the substance of a short chat with her mother when she came in from the excursion. That lady must have been mighty interested, Judith thought, to talk about Mr. Challis's affairs, which could not possibly concern any of them. She said as much, resentfully, to her sister.

"Well," said Sibyl, "I only tell you what she said to me. She drove Mrs. Barham home from Thanes, and they talked about it all the way. The Bishop had it on perfectly good authority. I think it was the editor of some well-known paper, who had heard it from a gentleman who had interviewed Mr. Challis for him. You know how they do?" Oh yes!—Judith knew. "Well, this gentleman had it from Mr. Challis himself, who had begged him very earnestly to say nothing about it. So, of course, nothing appeared in the article."

"What a delicate-minded editor!"

"I think it was very nice of him. Why not? But you always sneer, Ju. Anyhow, that's what the *madre* said to me. And we agreed that the sooner you knew the better...."

"And why?"

"Oh, well, because, of course.... However, we can't discuss that now at this time of night. I only know what Mrs. Barham said the Bishop said...."

"What did His Holiness say?"

"Judith, if you sneer I won't talk to you.... Well, the Bishop said that if he had his way, he would refuse Holy Communion to all people's Deceased Wife's Sisters... there!—you know what I mean perfectly well, Judith."



Judith had started a protest, but gave up the point. "I know what you mean. But why doesn't he?"

"Mrs. Barham said he did not feel sure of the support of Public Opinion. But for all that this gentleman was living in Sin, technically if not actually, or actually as well as technically, or . . . well!—I forget which . . . with this woman." Sibyl paused; the pause was a tribute to the force of the curl of her sister's lip. She ended: "Come, Ju, you can't call her a *lady*, you know!"

"Did the Bishop say gentleman?"

"No. By-the-bye, I think the Bishop *did* say man. But, of course, he would speak scripturally. Besides, all gentlemen are men too, but all women are not ladies."

The curl died very slowly on Judith's lip, if at all. "Poor Mr. Challis!" said she. "He doesn't know what he's losing—at least, what he *would* lose if it wasn't for Bishop Barham's respect for the World. Fancy having the Holy Communion refused one—by Bishop Barham! . . ."

"Judith! If you're going to blaspheme! . . ."

"I'm not, dear. I'm going to say good-night And to-morrow I'll tell Mr. Challis of his parlous plight."

"Oh, Ju, you never will!"

"Wait and see! Good-night, dear." The "dear" was rather perfunctory. And it was not to correct it to tenderness that Judith turned back in the doorway and reclosed it from within. "I want to know what you meant by 'the usual thing,' " she said, and waited.

"I thought you said you didn't think it mattered."

"I don't think it does. But I want to know what you meant by it, just the same."

The return into the room to ask the question added to its weight somehow. Sibyl might have answered more forcibly and less pertly had it been asked during conversation. "I should have thought, after the Honourable Stephen, that that went without saying."

"'After the Honourable Stephen'! . . . Sibyl!" There is growing resentment in the handsome woman's voice of protest, and a slight flinching in her sister's manner recognises it. She speaks uncomfortably.

"Well, what would you have me say? You know quite

well, Ju, that the *madre* thinks so too. What is the use of pretending ?”

Judith's colour is heightened as she closes the door to prevent some one hearing in the passage—her maid perhaps or her sister's. “*I* see no use in pretending, Sib. If you and mamma are going to say spiteful and malicious things, you had better speak them out. . . . Yes, it is spiteful and malicious to try to make out that there was anything between me and Stephen Lyell ; it is simply wicked to use the word flirtation. . . . No—I know you have not actually used it—but it's the same thing. It was that woman entirely ! And you know it !”

“I should have felt as she did. Besides, Lady Di Lyell's no fool. Look how you had him to yourself all day long . . . oh yes !—I know what you are going to say. Perhaps there wasn't. But some people can get on perfectly well without *any* love-making. I think that way's the worst ; it's insidious and hypocritical. Yes, Judith !—if you *are* going to flirt with a married man, I would sooner you did it above-board.” Notice Sibyl's elisions, and how easily understood they seemed to be. Sisters' intercourse is based on concurrent consciousnesses of the actual ; sometimes admitted, sometimes concealed. These two had harboured theirs from the nursery, usually finding speech for them. In the present case they had never spoken quite openly, though each knew the other knew of her knowledge, and pointed allusions to flirtations with married men had been perfectly well understood.

Judith has been keeping back a great deal of anger—she has self-control in plenty—to affect a certain patronage of a younger sister ; albeit she has only a couple of years more to her half of the fifty they share between them. “Sib dear !” she says. “You are entirely absurd—quite childish. If her jealous ladyship wasn't secure against me and poor, good, honourable Stephen, where is married bliss to find security ? Unless men and women are never to be friends at all.”

“Nobody objects to it that I know of. Only not one at a time. You know the difference that makes as well as I do—as well as everyone does.”

Probably Judith did, and that was why she said nothing—



or, at least, in what she did say made no reply to the last assertion, but went back to the general question. She put her hand on the door-handle to suggest peroration, and spoke collectedly and coldly.

"You are quite wrong, Sibyl, when you use the word 'flirtation' about me and Stephen Lyell. Cordial acquaintance is quite enough—even friendship is a little overstrained. Not but that we are very good friends, and should always keep so, only for that fool of a woman! But I shall always think somebody made mischief." She turned the door-handle to indicate the penultimate character of what was coming, but did not open the door. "And as for this Mr. Alfred Challis or 'Titus Scroop'—who is a person, by-the-bye, with whom any sort of flirtation would be *simply impossible*—he's just a clever playwright, without the slightest pretence to be considered a . . . no!—I wasn't going to say gentleman; let me finish . . . accustomed to the ways of Society." Sibyl didn't feel convinced, but kept her counsel. "And I have my own reasons for wishing to cultivate his acquaintance."

Now, surely, at this late hour of the night, and after so active a day, and with these two young ladies' respective maids wondering *sotto voce* on the landing outside what on earth it's all about—surely that door-handle might have turned in earnest! But we all know the fire that seems put out, with a spark still chuckling in its core at the nice blaze it means to be one day. Perhaps if Sibyl had said, "I ss—see" with less of suggestion that some human frailty undefined had been sighted by her shrewdness, and had commanded her sympathy; and perhaps (even more) if she had abstained from saying to herself, "I thought it was that," in a voice that was evidently intended to be heard, yet to seem inaudible—perhaps the fire would not have broken out again. As it was, the door-handle had a relapse, and its manipulator said rather sharply: "Thought it was what?"

"The Stage," was the reply. "Oh yes, Ju!—I know all about it; so you needn't look like a Tragedy Queen. Pray disgrace your family! Good-night, dear."

"Sibyl, you are a thoroughly selfish woman . . . did you say *why*? Why—because you are indulging all your own

fancies—just flinging away hundreds on all sorts of useless fads, and all the while opposing me in a reasonable wish—for it *is* reasonable to wish to give it a trial—because of a miserable, old-fashioned prejudice against a profession which at least is as respectable as hammering little copper pots and making little bits of fsusy enamelled jewellery. I can't tell you how *sick* I get of hearing of it all. . . .” Anger at mere impertinence does not involve a flush, like resentment against a charge of misdemeanour on a point of delicacy. But one can go white with anger, and Judith's change of colour may be due to it, as she says what she evidently means to be her last word. Sibyl tries to deprive it of a last word's advantage.

“If you are going to take that tone, Ju,” she replies, “I think we had better talk no more about it. And how little copper pots can have anything fast or disreputable about them I don't know. But pray disgrace your family, if you can get anyone to help you—Mr. Scoop, or Challis, or anyone.” Then this young lady did not play fair, for she said, or as good as said, that if her sister was as tired and sleepy as she herself was, she wouldn't stand there talking, but would go to bed. But even this was not so bad as adding: “And what all this has to do with Mr. Scoop's Deceased Wife's Sister I can't imagine!” The dry tone in which Judith said, “Nor I, dear!” may have conveyed her views about her sister's powers of Logic, without more enlargement—at least, she indulged in none, and went away to her own bedroom, rather despising herself for feeling exasperated, but knowing that she was so by the satisfaction she got from an increased indifference to what her family thought about the theatrical profession. Her stage-mania was getting the bit in its teeth. But she could find it in her heart to laugh at Sibyl for trying to support her own fads on the moral repute of little copper pots. Why, so far as that went, the little pots might be anchorites in deserts for any power they had of blemishing it.

As for “Mr. Scroop's Deceased Wife's Sister,” *that*, she knew, was nonsense, because he had told her the name of his first wife. Or, stop a minute!—might she not have been a half-sister? Judith guessed shrewdly. But then—it occurred to her presently—would that count? She



thought of this after she was in bed, and was half inclined to get up, and look up the point in her prayer-book.

The suspicion that had crossed Challis's mind in the drawing-room was confirmed by the way his companion had glanced at herself in the mirror, before answering his question about the beauty of her friend the stage-aspirant, more than by the wording of her answer. After all, the fact that a good-looking woman had refused an unqualified testimonial to the beauty of an alleged friend was very negative evidence indeed that she was all the while speaking of herself. But the glance at her reflection seemed natural enough to him under the circumstances, though he was ready to admit that, much as he had written about them, he did *not* understand women. His conclusion from it was supported by something not altogether natural in the tone of the answer; the substance of it might be no more than provisional modesty, to cover future confession. Had she answered that her friend had a Juno-like figure, a splendid Greek brow and nose, rich coils of dark hair, a stately column of a throat, and ample justification for evening dress whenever warranted by authority—could she have looked him in the face later and claimed the identity? Challis dwelt upon the inventory more than was needed, and decided that the semi-evasion had been skilful, and had shown that its author was superior to frivolous vanities. There was glamour about this: men persist in ascribing high qualities to beautiful women, and only concede them grudgingly to dowdies as a set-off to their unhappy plainness.

Anyhow, even if he was mistaken, his mistake would give him a sound ground for writing as much as he was inclined to write about this young lady to Marianne; and he felt, without exactly knowing why, inclined to write rather liberally about her. Perhaps, if he had had a mind for self-vivisection, he would have found that he shrank from acknowledging the reason he had hitherto flinched from writing about her to his wife; which was, briefly, that he was just too far *entiché* to feel at ease in telling her how much in love he had fallen with one of the daughters, and how awfully jolly she was, and how awfully jealous she, Marianne, would be if she was there to see. *You know—male*

reader over head and ears in wedlock—that that is what *you* would have written, and despatched with an authenticating photograph if one was attainable. And you would have asked for the last photo of your correspondent in return—the one with baby pulling her hair; not that beastly one yearning, with the lips slightly parted—to give as a swop to your new love; because six copies were to come from Elliott and Fry's, and we could have as many more as we wanted. But Mr. Alfred Challis was not so detached as all this; and, without absolutely suspecting it, he was not sorry to be supplied with a well-defined *locus scribendi*, where all analysis and justification would merge and be forgotten. He felt, with such a licence of free pen, much more ready to go to work with his long letter to Marianne about that long walk to the Rectory to-day. See what a lot he could find to tell about that Parson who wanted (or didn't) to marry his Deceased Wife's Sister! Partly on the question itself—one, of course, of the greatest interest to both—and partly, if not more, because he had just remembered that surely the name of the Parson who took on the duties for Charlotte Eldridge's reverend cousin out Clapham way was Athelstan Something; and hadn't he, the said cousin, been known to come away to this part of the world to take his friend's duties in the country and get change of air? Of course! And then, too, there was the incident of the sofa in the evening. Yes!—he would make the peep into the mirror amusing.

They were new candles all through again this evening—really! . . . the extravagance in these great houses! What would Marianne say if she saw it? But so much the better! Candles that have never been blown out give a much better light than restarted ones—who can say why? Challis settled down soon to his long letter, and wrote well into the night. The four candles he had enlisted had burned down to mere housekeeper's perquisites—substitute-justifiers—by the time he had signed himself Marianne's loving Tite; and after a good stretch in acknowledgment of an hour's bent back, had lighted an isolated sample with an extinguisher-parasite, so as to blow all four out together, and keep them neck and neck.

After he was in bed he said to himself that he must make



sure that letter went by the first post, or it would only reach Marianne such a short time before the writer. It was very stupid of him, that it was, to have allowed so many days to pass before writing a proper account of "these people" to his wife. She had only had such very perfunctory letters before. He classed it as a stupidity. However, it might end by his overstaying the week he was asked for by more than an extra day already bespoken, and then this long letter would seem in better keeping. That would make it all right.

## CHAPTER IX

MARIANNE CHALLIS had never become quite reconciled to her new life at the Hermitage at Wimbledon, obvious as was the improvement on her old home in Great Coram Street. What she would have liked would have been that Titus—for she had adopted the Christian name of his *nom de plume*, not without pride—should become a brilliant and successful author, that a plentiful income should take the place of the modest salary of a subordinate—important, but still a subordinate—in a City accountant's ; but that, nevertheless, their old life should go on as it had done since their marriage nine years ago.

She made little concessions and reservations. They would have had a bath put up in the little room next the nursery, on the second floor, with a regular hot-water service from the kitchen. The old kitchen-range might have been got rid of at the same time, and a new one put in its place, with a proper oven, and then it wouldn't have been one long grumble-grumble-grumble from Elizabeth Barclay all day long. They could have had the roof seen to, and the window-frames seen to, and the drains seen to, and all the substantial repairs attended to ; and they could have made the landlord do it as soon as they were in a position to threaten him with legal proceedings if he didn't. But really, when you have no means but a limited salary, and a boy's schooling to pay for !— so Mrs. Challis had said to Mrs. Eldridge, a friend in her confidence, and as *she* didn't finish the sentence, we need not. And then the drawing-room could have been made quite pretty, with the same patterned paper, of course, and as near as we could get the carpet. Only it was second-hand when poor Kate bought it fourteen years ago, and the man from Shoolbred's said the pattern was out of date. And as for the beds and the blinds and curtains, it would have been just as easy to have



them all new at Coram Street as at Wimbledon. And really Titus could have done perfectly well with the top back attic, out of the noise, to do his writing in. It could have been made quite nice, and would have looked ever so much bigger with book-cases round.

However, it couldn't be helped now. Titus had condemned the top back attic, and made a fuss about the walls sloping in. Of course, she only meant bookcases on the straight-up walls. But men were like that, and you might talk to them till Doomsday. Mrs. Challis left something defective here also, and we are again under no obligation to complete the sentence for her.

Of course Titus had a much nicer room now—at least, a much larger one. What he wanted such a big room for Marianne couldn't imagine. Just look at the way he wrote that first book, "The Spendthrift's Legacy." In pocket-books and on omnibuses! Just everywhere! However, it pleased him, and when he was pleased he was satisfied. As long as he didn't complain! And yet once more Mrs. Eldridge had to nod an implied easy interpretation with closed lips. She—a wife herself—could understand.

Very likely the might-have-been, in Marianne Challis's mind, of a glorified Great Coram Street, with the successful author turning out immortal works in a glorified top back attic, was only an allotropic form of a condemnation of things that had come to pass at the new home at Wimbledon. Very likely, too, it was unconscious on her part. She may never have noticed that the imaginary new chapters of the closed volume of the old home contained no reference to the new friends her husband's great success had brought about him, to the new Club he belonged to, and met celebrities at, to the dinner invitations that frankly left her out, and—almost more irritating—those that followed a perfunctory card-shedding visit that shouted aloud, "Because we can't ask him and leave *you* out, good author's wife!" The imaginary visitors her fancy saw in the renovated might-have-been drawing-room were John and Charlotte Eldridge, and the Smithsons and Miss Macculloch—not grandma; for Marianne's desire for her mother's presence did not go to the length of cancelling her bronchitis in order to bring her out on imaginary Saturday

evenings. And those visionary social gatherings never held a dream of young authoresses, with a strange power of appealing to our hidden sympathies, and dresses that must have cost God knows what. But she never noticed the omission. Nor that of the theatrical people, nor the press people ; nor the swells—male and female—who came to sit at the feet of Genius, and be civil to its wife, who, though she may have been slow about *some* things, could see through all *that*, and really never went out, thank you !

But a few days' change was just what her husband wanted. That was what she had said to Lady Arkroyd of Royd Hall, in Rankshire, a case in point, whom her husband had met at Sir Spender's, as he called him, and had encouraged to call on Mrs. Challis at Wimbledon. Now, at Great Coram Street, or the glorified fetch of it, no such person appeared ; though, indeed, a few inexplicable fetches were supplied by fancy of people who were in earnest when they wanted her to come too. Neither Lady Arkroyd nor Lady Betty Inglis, who accompanied her, had gone beyond civility point—only men never saw anything, you knew they didn't !

Charlotte Eldridge (in this case) knew perfectly, dear !—and backed up Marianne in refusing to go to Royd. Alfred Challis said it was the merest temper ; but was he sorry she didn't go ?—Marianne wondered. She rather preferred not going, to say the truth, but she would have liked Titus to be really sorry. And even though she had known just as well that he was only pretending he wanted her to come too, she would have liked him to pretend a little better. If he had done this, she would really have enjoyed his absence a great deal more, and it would have helped her to believe she didn't enjoy it. She honestly wanted to.

Because she was one of those housekeepers who reconcile good housekeeping with what they call a little peace and quiet. These ends are contributed to by the temporary abeyance of the household. Scarcely by its permanent absence—that would alter the character of the position altogether. This position was that an unendurable stress of responsibility was borne by the house's mistress in her position, so to speak, of ship's master. The navigation rested entirely on her shoulders, and the Captain meddled.



Captains seldom did anything else, and there *was* no peace and quiet until they were at their office in the City, or locked up in their cabin, as might be. In that cabin, as in Challis's case, they pursued some private end which had no relation to the stern realities of Life. It might chance, as was admitted in theory, to have something to do with the settlement of weekly accounts—a remote connection of a vague ideal kind. But the keeping of the log, the regulation of the chronometers, the comparison of charts—well, really, it was impossible to attend to them for the fidget, till the Captain was safely entombed in his cabin and out of the way! And Charlotte Eldridge knew all that as well as Marianne did. *She* could understand, if anyone could. As for schoolboys, everybody knew what a boy in a house was; hence, broadly speaking, the sooner he was back at school the better. When home for the holidays, there was *no* peace; and it was just as well to look the fact in the face, and not be deceived by any false prophets.

However, there was something to be said for the prophets in that Jerusalem at Wimbledon when the nominal head of the household was on a visit in the country, and that dreadful boy was playing cricket and wouldn't be back till late. This September afternoon there was a little peace and quiet at last, and Charlotte Eldridge and Mrs. Challis could chat—at least, till the husband of the former called in on his way from the station to walk home with her across the common. Let the record of their talk be taken anywhere, at random. Take the images of them, also at random, from any one of a thousand semi-detached villas in the suburbs of London, and, if you choose ladies of thirty odd, true centres of the English middle-class, you will have all the description you will want for the present.

"They're not girls. At least, *I* don't call them girls," said Mrs. Challis, shutting the pot-lid on the tea. Then she blew the spirit out, because it wasn't wanted any more.

"Twenty-six and twenty-four," said the other lady. Not an opinion of her own, but a placarding of authorised figures for consideration. They remained in view, neither sanctioned nor censured. Marianne left the point.

"Why aren't they married, is what I look at."

"Looks, perhaps. Or short tempers. Either tells.

Does Mr. Challis mention their figures ? Because figures go a long way." Mrs. Eldridge seems to speak as an authority. Marianne nods agreement as a general rule. But presently takes exception :

"There would be money," she says. "And that makes a difference. Besides, his letter lays a good deal of stress on one of their figures. I'm never surprised at figures when it's those sort of persons, in girls. They have to." The implication seemed to be that the she-toff, figureless, got suppressed—cancelled somehow.

"He says looks *too*, doesn't he ?"

"One of them, certainly. But you can't tell, from men. And it's one thing one time, another another." Here a pause, following a question from Mrs. Eldridge, "Have you stirred it ?" and an irrelevant answer, "I don't want it to get too strong," from Mrs. Challis. Then tea. During which the subject is picked up and dropped at intervals, an eye being kept on it throughout. It is like a mouse a cat is warden of.

"I suppose the good-looking one is the one he sees most of. They do." Mrs. Eldridge is enigmatical.

Her friend is almost equally so. "I suppose it's better always to take no notice of it," she says.

"Always better." Decisively, as from an authority.

"The other one carves something, or does art needle-work. When grandma was a girl they did painting on velvet—poonah, it was called. Or took likenesses. But then they wore ringlets."

"I know. And their waists were goodness knows where. But they did ruins in water-colours."

"In sepia. Ma has some in a portfolio. Ready for your other cup ?" The answer is substantially in the affirmative.

"Don't put the sugar in this time. They're such big lumps. . . . Thanks ! . . . Yes, that was before it was Art Things, and Liberty's. They were just regarded as accomplishments where there were daughters. Then, if they became old maids, they kept it up. Because they had such families." This did not mean that the old maids of three generations back created scandals, but that our grandmother's domestic cares stood in the way of their career as poonah-painters and so forth.



Mrs. Challis cut the cake. Some always wait till this stage of tea to do this. But there are many schools. Then she said : " Titus says it's photography has put an end to all that sort of thing. I shouldn't wonder."

" Nor I." But Mrs. Eldridge adds that she doesn't care about Art Objects for their own sake, though they do for presents. She then picks up the dropped mouse she has had an eye on. " Which is the one that slums ?" she asks.

" Oh—both ! So does their lady-mother." There is a trace of bitterness in this expression. " But only by the way. I don't suppose they stick to anything."

" What does the good-looking one do ?" No immediate answer coming, the speaker throws a light, " Perhaps she's a vegetarian, or antivivisectionist ?"

" No, it's neither of those. But I've no business to tell. Titus said not, in the postscript."

" He wouldn't mind me."

" I don't know, dear. Perhaps it was you he meant. However, you must promise not to tell, if I get the letter."

" My dear !—as if I should tell ! You know I never say a word !"

Marianne felt she had done her duty by this letter as she left the room to get it. For had she not honourably resolved not to show it, and even gone the length of locking it into a drawer to prove her resolution ? And didn't her getting up from her tea show what an honourable intent she had been acting under. Oh yes, she had done her duty. Besides, what did it matter ?

" Here's his letter. I don't expect he'll be home till Thursday.... No, I suppose I mustn't show you the whole. I'll read the bits."

" You hadn't had your tea." Mrs. Eldridge felt quite secure of the mouse, as she knew her husband wouldn't come before 6.30, and the train was always behind. She felt so secure that she interjected a remark on another subject—dress. She saw Marianne had on her plaid, and admitted her wisdom ; it had gone so much colder. How those stuffs did last out ! It really looked as good as new. Then she recommended those little oblong things with jam in the middle, which she had tried and her hostess hadn't ; the latter, though, had bought them at the new confectioner's.

Marianne put the letter safe out of the way of spills and slops, and finished her tea. During which the mouse may be said to have remained on the floor, watched. Then she picked up the letter, and after glancing through a page not germane to the matter, identified that which was. "Here it is," she said, and went on reading:—" ' You will be amused at what I think I have found out about Judith, the handsome eldest one I told you of. She is stage-struck—wants to go on the boards! She has not said it directly to me, but I feel pretty certain that a "friend" she tells me of, who has these aspirations, is no other than *herself*. However, I may be mistaken. This is what I judge from: We were sitting on a sofa' . . . " The reader paused, looking on into the text.

Mrs. Eldridge struck in: "Where was the sofa? Does he say where the sofa was?"

"My dear Charlotte!" Marianne expostulated, "*can* it matter? Besides, he *says*— However, I'll go straight on if you're going to fancy I'm leaving anything out." And then continued, reading fair: ". . . 'on a sofa in the drawing-room after dinner. When she had told me about this friend, having asked me first if I knew lots of actors and actresses, I asked what sort of looking girl the friend was. *I saw her look in a glass on the wall before she answered*. And then she said something rather evasive about beauty being a matter of opinion, and that there was probably enough in this case for working purposes. She had disparaged her friend's performance, as it struck me, out of all proportion to her apparent anxiety to advocate her cause, and a sort of confidence that she would succeed. I put this down to protest of personal modesty, as well as the look in the glass.' "

Marianne paused, saying, "I see that," and Mrs. Eldridge said also: "I see *that*." Whereupon the former said, unreasonably: "What *don't* you see?" and her friend replied: "Nothing. Go on." Which Marianne did, after a very slight hesitation, as of doubt.

" 'I annex a plan of the position, showing the angle at which the mirror was placed, the relative positions of myself and the lady, and our respective images in the glass. So I could see plainly by looking at her reflection that she



took a good long look at herself before answering my question.' ”

“Is there another cup left, dear ?” said Mrs. Eldridge. “Never mind if you haven’t. . . .”

“It won’t be good,” said the tea-maker feelingly. But the applicant said never mind, that would do ! She liked it strong. But might she look at the plan ? She would promise not to read. There was nothing there she needn’t read, said her friend. Nevertheless, she folded back the script behind the rough bird’s-eye view, with dotted lines of sight to show how things had worked.

“Well !” said Marianne, as she handed the cup of tea—which didn’t look bad.

“I don’t believe the sofa was half as long as that.”

“Charlotte—you’re ridiculous !”

“Well, I *don’t* ! Now go on reading. . . . ‘She took a good long look at herself. . . .’” Mrs. Eldridge considered whether she should reveal the thought in her mind that Mr. Challis must also have taken a good long look to know. No !—she would not ! Whatever she was, she was not a mischief-maker ; and to prove this to her own satisfaction, she not infrequently abstained from saying something about a lady and gentleman. She often found an opportunity of doing this, as she never thought on any subject not spiced with both. Satisfaction to conscience through this abstention would be sure to result in free handling soon after. Also, the abstention was easy to her this time, because she believed—rightly or wrongly—that Marianne knew she was making it.

Perhaps rightly, but no outward sign to that effect came. Marianne glanced forward in the letter, and went on reading : “ ‘This young woman, I fancy, is savagely jealous of the younger sister posing as an active promoter of all sions of upnesses-to-date. . . .’ I wish,” said the reader parenthetically, “that Titus wouldn’t use such unusual expressions. I dare say they are very clever, but I don’t profess to understand . . . what ? . . . Oh, of course, I see what he *means*, but it’s a kind of thing I shall never understand. . . . No. my dear Charlotte !—it’s no use talking and trying to persuade me. ‘Upnesses-to-date’—just fancy !” Now Titus had been in two minds whether

to allow this phrase to remain, but had decided to do so, as better on the whole than to provoke speculation over an obliterated text. *He* might have speculated himself over such an erasure.

"I don't think it implies anything," said Mrs. Eldridge, meaning, of course, anything about a lady and gentleman. "I fancy he is only referring to Art Movements and Liberty silks and things. Go on." And Marianne read :

" 'All sorts of upnesses-to-date, doing things her grandmothers would have thought *infra dig.* . . .' What does that mean ?"

"Lord, Marianne!—*that* doesn't mean anything. Do go on. Only what they would be too swell to do ! That's all." Marianne continued :

" ' *Infra dig.*, while she herself is not allowed to try her luck and face the music. She has the courage for it, evidently. Old Norman blood ! By-the-bye, I've been damning William the Conqueror up and down ever since I came. For the old cock is besotted about him. Says he was the first Socialist, and never talks of anything else ! . . . It's not interesting this !' She stopped.

"No—that's not interesting. I want to hear more about the girl's looks. Couldn't you find what he says about her figure ? You said he laid stress on it."

"In his other letter. Tall and striking. Dignified kind of girl."

"I should hardly call that laying stress on her *figure*, a such." Mrs. Challis reflects upon this rather paradoxical view of her friend's. She is not as clear as she might be often over her husband's elisions and hyperboles, and does not feel sure she reported him rightly. "Perhaps," she says, "I should not have said 'laid stress on.' " Her friend says oh no !—"laid stress on" was all right. But there was some indeterminateness in what he was said to have laid stress on. However, Mrs. Eldridge excuses further elucidation. "Sure there's nothing more about that girl ?" she asks.

"Yes, there's some more somewhere. Oh—here ! . . . 'As to the lovely Judith, of course, she might prove a duffer behind the footlights. But then, again, she mightn't.



She's the very thing for Aminta Torrington in "Mistaken Delicacy." ' That's the name his new play's to be called. I liked 'Atalanta in Paddington' better myself."

"Not nearly such a good title. No! If 'Mistaken Delicacy' hasn't been had a dozen times before, there couldn't be a better title. Of course, he wants her to play in it. What else is there?"

" 'Very thing for Aminta Torrington. . . .' Oh yes!—it's here . . . 'and I shall try to get her to see Prester John about it' . . . that's what they call Mr.—what's his name?—the manager at the Megatherium, don't you know? . . . 'about it, and see if we couldn't drill her up to performance point. She couldn't be a total . . . ' something crossed out. . . ."

"Let me look . . . oh no — that's nothing! Only *fiasco*. It's the same as failure." Mrs. Eldridge retained the letter and went on reading, unopposed. The erasure had clearly been an almost insultingly merciful one, to meet a defective knowledge half-way. She went on reading, scrapwise, half inaudibly at times; sometimes saying "hm-hm-hm," to stand for omissions. . . . " 'Couldn't be a total failure, because it isn't every day . . . thing happens . . . sort of Court-beauty . . . good family . . . make a set-off against inexperience . . . ' hm-hm! . . . 'elocution very good, as far as I can judge. . . . ' I don't see any more about her." Mrs. Eldridge read a good deal more of the letter to make sure of the point, although Marianne reached out her hand to take it back. The latter lady was looking rather nettled. She knew that *fiasco* meant *fizzle* perfectly well, and it was ridiculous of Titus to treat her like a school-girl.

Those who know the sort of person this young mater-familias in a plaid dress was, must know also what she meant by the phrase "a proper pride." It is easy for superior persons—toffs of birth, toffs of Science, Letters, Art—to decide that this phenomenon is a ridiculous egotism in anything so middle, so Victorian, so redolent of Leech or Cruikshank as Marianne Challis; to pronounce it an outcome of a simple incapacity to realise her own insignificance. Gracious mercy!—suppose we were all suddenly to "realise" our own insignificance! . . . But really the subject is not one that will bear thinking of. Dismiss

your insignificance with a caution ! And pray for a cloudy sky, that the stars may not remind you of it.

When Charlotte Eldridge had read all down the next page of the letter, she surrendered it to the hand that was waiting for it. But, even then, not without a glance down the following one as she let it go. Her friend apologized for taking it away.

“ I shouldn’t mind your reading it all, dear,” she said. “ But as I promised . . . ! ”

“ Quite right, dear ! ” And both these ladies felt they had made a sacrifice to Duty. The letter wasn’t to be shown, and a great deal of it had *not* been shown. What more could the most exacting ask ? How many ideals are as nearly attained in this imperfect world ?

“ However, there’s nothing in what you haven’t seen that could have interested you in the very least.” Having made out a good case for Conscience, why weaken it ? But probably Mrs. Challis is unaware that she does so. “ No !—there’s not a word more about the girl.” This is in answer to a question that could hardly remain unanswered merely because nobody had asked it. The negative chilled the conversation. *Why* was there not a word more about the girl ?

A disturbance upstairs caused Mrs. Challis to get up and leave the room. It was those children. Oh dear, what little plagues they were ! Presently she came back, explanatory. She believed it was really that odious girl Martha’s fault. She would have to get rid of her. But Titus always sided with the girl, and that made it so difficult. . . . What was it this time ? . . . Oh, the child wanted the iron. Martha was ironing, and of course paying no attention, and Emmie had burnt herself. No—not badly ; but a nasty burn ! Marianne’s style does not favour definition.

The two ladies sit on into the twilight—early, from a south-east wind bringing the town-fog westward—and are less talkative. The slow-combustion grate’s first snail-like manifestations this year—for the weather has been mild till to-day—begin to glimmer in a half-dusk favourable to their detection. The children will be down directly to say good-night. One can’t talk till they are done with and



out of the way. Presently they come, but are not allowed to rush to the cake at once. They shall have some directly. The casualty, Emmie, who yelled, exhibits an arm between four and five years old with a scar on it. She consents to goldbeater's skin on condition that she licks the place herself. But what did that matter when there was cake? All children have but one relation to cake. They *want* it, and when that piece is done, they want another the same size, or larger. These two were quite one with their kind on this point, but they took the first piece behind a sofa to devour it; even as a Royal Bengal Tiger at the Zoological carries away a horror a vegetarian would die of into his bedroom, lest you should get it and eat it first. But they came out for more; which the tiger never does, because he knows it isn't any use, and prefers to pretend he doesn't care to ask favours and be refused.

"I shall give them a couple of grains of Dover's powder apiece," said their mother. "They've had nothing for a month." This good lady held with the practice of a dose now and again, independent of symptoms. "If it were not for me, they would be left altogether without medicine. It's a thing their father always opposes me about." The words "Dover's powder" were said a little too soon to be unheard by the persons concerned, and the consequence was that Emmie the younger one bit Martha, the nurse, going upstairs. However, this incident, with the ructions that arose from it, was closed in time; and a little more peace and quiet followed in its wake.

"I wonder at your husband and that Martha girl. Look at her teeth!"

"My dear Charlotte, Titus quite likes Martha, compared to Harmood, whose teeth are really good, considering that she only takes sixteen pounds." Harmood was the house-and-parlourmaid—a special antipathy of the great author's.

"Well!—I wonder at it, is all I can say. They go so much by teeth. Besides, look at the way she hooks her dress. The whole thing! You may depend on it that Mr. Challis is only doing it for a blind, because Harmood's pretty. . . ."

"Doing what for a blind?"

"Oh, my dear child, what a silly you are! You know perfectly well what I mean. That sort of thing. He

wants you to think he hasn't any eyes, and makes believe to prefer the ugly one. Lots of husbands go on like that—only simpletons never see anything."

"I can't see that it makes any difference to me, either way."

"Very well, dear! Look at it your own way. Only don't blame me and say I didn't tell you!"

Marianne failed, owing to lack of constructive power in emergencies, in an attempt to devise something sharp to say to her friend. However, as that lady closed with a snap, even as a moral physician who had written a prescription and done her duty, there was time to consider an extempore—an *ex multo tempore*, one might say.

"I wish you would say exactly what you mean, Charlotte."

"What about? About the servants?"

"No. About Titus."

"My dear Marianne, it isn't any use talking about it. A woman in your position has to expect it. . . ."

"Yes! But expect what?"

"If you won't interrupt me, I'll tell you. Of course, you know I know perfectly well your husband is to be trusted, and all that sort of thing. He has too much genuine regard for you. But I always have thought, and always shall think, that men can't help themselves. . . ."

"What for? I mean, why do you go on raking up? Can't you leave alone?"

"That's just what I was going to say, dear! Especially in this case. Because there's really no need, if you come to think of it. I'll tell you, dear, exactly what I should *recommend* you to do—what *I* should do if I were in your place. I should either say *absolutely nothing*, or if I said anything at all, just make it chaff—talk about his new flame—say you will evidently have to get somebody else, don't you see? As if it was entirely out of the question! Or perhaps that would be dangerous, and it wouldn't do to have him thinking you suspected him of fancying you weren't in earnest. No!—on the whole, I recommend saying *absolutely nothing*."

Marianne's brain refuses to receive complications beyond a certain point. She picks up the last intelligible phrase.

"As if *what* was entirely out of the question?"



But Mrs. Eldridge is on her guard against making mischief. "You mustn't run away with the idea that I said there *was* anything," is the form her caution takes. And then, in response to an angry flush on her friend's face, "I'm sure there isn't the slightest reason for you to be uneasy. I have far too much faith in your husband to suppose such a thing possible for one moment. . . . No, indeed, dear!—even if she gets him to get her into this play of his—and then, of course, they would go on seeing each other—I shouldn't feel the smallest uneasiness. Because look at her social position!"

"What *has* her social position got to do with it?"

Mrs. Eldridge elevates her eyebrows, and perhaps her shoulders, slightly, as though asking space what next? But she brings both down to the level of her friend's knowledge of the world before answering: "I should have said *everything*. A woman in her position doesn't commit herself in any way with a man in your husband's, however distinguished he may be. Read any divorce-case of that sort of people, and see if they don't have co-respondents of condition. Of course, I'm not speaking of disgraceful cases, where the woman isn't received after. But ordinary divorce-cases in *Fashionable Life*."

"I can't see what you're talking about, Charlotte."

"Then I can't help it, dear. But I should have thought it was pretty plain, for all that!"

Marianne laughs, a little uneasily. "Do you mean to say, Charlotte, that because Titus goes away for a week to a country-house . . . ?"

"Go on, dear." But Marianne is not constitutionally a sentence-finisher. She begins again:

"Why isn't Titus to speak to a lady without a preach about it?"

"My dear child, nobody's preaching. If you were to listen to me, instead of becoming impatient . . ."

"I'm not impatient! But you know it's irritating, and you can't deny it."

"Very well, dear, I won't then. But let me finish what I was saying. If you had listened to me, you would have seen my meaning. I was all the time exonerating your husband from the suspicion of even the slightest flirtation

with this showy girl. I was trying to make your mind easy about them, and to say that even if they *are* rather thrown together—as of course they must be, because one knows what country-houses are . . .”

“Now, Charlotte, that *is* nonsense! Why are country-houses any different from town-houses? What stuff!” Marianne sees a light on the horizon. She knows about country-houses, because she was a girl in the country once. But much of her friend’s analyses and insights had been so much unqualified Sordello to her, and had left her brain spinning. She can and will hold fast that which is good, and stick to the country-houses. And clearly, if she can prove that country and town-houses are on all fours for the purposes of Charlotte’s world—a world where a sort of dowdy Eros dodders respectably about, all the Greek fire knocked out of him—then a stopper will be put on these suggestions of infidelities. She does not see all the connecting-links, but would like to unhorse her opponent somehow.

That lady is also ready to let the issue turn provisionally on town and country-house life. But this is for a reason of her own. She pursues the subject: “It’s *not* stuff, dear. There’s all the difference in the world. In country-houses people split up into couples, and there’s no check. Chaperones on long walks, of course!—only they can’t go so quick, and get left behind. In town, no such thing. And there’s really no such thing as staying with, in town, either. Practically. Of course, now and again friends from the country to stay a few days. But it isn’t the same thing, going to the Royal Academy and the New Gallery. The Zoological Gardens is a good deal more like, only scarcely anybody goes. Wasn’t that John’s knock?”

It was, apparently, and was followed by John’s pocket-handkerchief—at least, that was how a very loud noise was inexactly classified. Whatever its proper name was, it caused its promoter’s wife to fear his cold was worse. He must have his feet in mustard and hot water. But his attitude was, when he had replaced the contingent remainder of the noise—a real pocket-handkerchief—in his pocket, that his cold was nearly well, and no human power should induce him to submit to treatment of any sort;



but mustard and hot water least of all. He would go and have a Turkish Bath, and kill himself. Not that *he* anticipated a fatal result ; his wife forecast that for him. It transpired shortly that he habitually set himself in opposition to all her wishes, and went his own way. But in so doing he encountered frequent disasters, his rescues from which were always achieved by her, single-handed, with constant addition to a long score of debt, unpaid by him, on account of which he never so much as said thank-you !

Mr. Eldridge was a person who defied description, in a certain sense ; but only because description calls for materials, and he supplied none, or nearly none. He might have been the Average Man himself, for any salient point that he presented. An observant person, called on to recollect what he was like, would probably have remembered that he shaved, all but a little whisker, and given up the rest of him to oblivion.

His conversation, after the Turkish Bath had passed away, was an inquiry if his wife was ready ; and, after he had been told not to fuss, but to sit down and make himself agreeable, a statement that it was a good deal colder than yesterday. So it afforded a natural opportunity to his good lady of giving him a chance to enrich it by comment on the subject in hand at the time of his arrival. She did not wish to drop it, having, in fact—as hinted above—a purpose in dwelling on it.

“ We’re talking about country-houses,” said she.

“ What houses ?” said he ; and then, without waiting for an answer : “ Oh—country-houses ! Where ?”

“ Don’t pretend to be stupid, John. Nowhere, of course ! No particular houses—country-houses in general. And town-houses.”

“ Oh, I see ! What about ’em ? How’s the children ?”

“ Never mind them ! Listen to me.” Marianne interjected that perhaps they hadn’t gone to bed, and she could ring for Martha to see. But she didn’t do it, and no one urged it. So the children lapsed, and Mrs. Eldridge proceeded : “ Pay attention to what I’m saying, John, and put that glass down. You’ll break it.” He did as he was bid. “ We—*are—talking—about—the* differences between country-houses and town-houses.” To which Mr. Eldridge

replied, "Oh, ah!—yes, to be sure! Well!—you'd have to see 'em both," causing his wife to despair visibly of male intelligence, with endurance, before starting afresh with an appearance of willingness to make things easy for a slow apprehension: "We were talking about the difference of the way one lives, in town and in the country. Nothing to *do* with premises."

She then went on to put a hypothetical case, to enable her husband to grasp the full range of the recent conversation. Supposing that he had been a young man enamoured of a damsel whose sentiments towards himself were a matter of conjecture—suppose, in fact, he were "paying attention"; that was how the lady put it—would he prefer to press his suit in a town-house or a country-house? She made the question a leading one by suggesting divine solitudes congenial to the development of tender passions, and a climate favourable to the inspection of sunsets and moonrises. So tempting was the prospect to the mind of her hearer that he made a grimace expressive of greedy delight, and gave a low whistle. "'Ooky!" said he, dropping an aspirate humorously. "Country-houses—rather!"

"*Any* man would say so at once, Marianne." Which Mrs. Eldridge contrives to articulate in a way that implies, Heaven knows how, that their discussion has had application to some particular case—no mere abstract review of the subject. For the apprehension of her husband is reached, with the effect that he says, with an expression of roused interest: "I say, Lotty, tell up. Who's the party? Who's at it now?" But he does not press for information, because his wife checks him skilfully with, "Hush, John!—never mind now! I'll tell you after." His comment, "Some gal, I suppose," suggests some lucid vision into life and character beyond its drain on the resources of language.

Marianne Challis would have entered joyously enough with her friend into the building up of a situation involving only a neighbour's husband or wife, but she would fain have put a brake on the car of Gossip in her own husband's case. The worst of it was that every word she had said so far, with that intention, had only brought about an



increase of speed. And now she was conscious that if she put in any protest of her faith in her husband's stability, matters would be made ten times worse. The horses would get the bit in their teeth. At least, his name had not been mentioned, nor the company he was in, before this stupid John Eldridge. All this, or the protoplasm of it, hung about her mind as she began saying, "If you mean..." and stopped. But she had, even with those three words, put her head in the lion's mouth past recall. Her friend interrupted her.

"I don't mean to say a *single—word—more*, dear, to you or to anyone. So don't be uneasy. But you see what John thinks." The speaker, as she rose to her feet with these words, as one gathering up for departure, showed as a young woman in black, of a lissome, yet angular type; taller than her friend, and with more claim, from personal experience of her own figure, to sit in judgment on other women's. But her complexion is not as good as Marianne's—a rather sallow one, not free from a sense of freckles. However, that may only be the firelight.

John, merely conscious that something male and female was under discussion, had put on what he conceived to be the proper look for the father of a family equal to all moral emergencies. His face would have served just as well for that of a person doing subtraction with a sense of responsibility. This ambiguity of outward rendering of the phases of his mind, of course, gave corresponding latitude to his wife's interpretation of it.

Marianne had a growing misgiving that she was becoming skilfully entangled in the meshwork of an undeserved embarrassment, and floundered in desperation. "I don't the least understand what you *mean*, Charlotte," she said. "What *does* he think? What *about*?" On this he asserted himself.

"No, I say, you know! Don't bring *me* in—don't bring *me* in! I know nothing, you know—nothing at all, you know! Mum's the word, you know—always keep out of this sort of thing!" He enforced his words by pursing up his mouth and shaking his head continuously, in a kind of paroxysm of caution. He also turned somewhat purple, and his eyes grew smaller. These combinations put the

finishing-touch on the strength of his wife's position. She threw up a new and final entrenchment, and, as it were, closed the subject officially.

"You do—quite—right, John," said she, "to keep out of it. That's all you've got to do." She then assumed quite suddenly a large-hearted tone of liberality. "And, after all," she said, "what does it all come to? Just nothing whatever! I'm sure, dear Marianne, you need not allow yourself to feel the *least* uneasiness—not for a moment! With a husband like yours! Only think! You'll see it will be all right, dear—just recollect what I say! Now we must go. I'll go and get my cloak—it's upstairs. No!—don't *you* come...." But Marianne goes, for all that.

Mr. Eldridge, left to himself, whistled a monotonous tune over and over again, and flicked a glove that was on with another that was off. He threw his eyes opener by fits and starts, as if he were trying on a new pair of lids. Then he produced the vanished pocket-handkerchief, and held it by two corners before him, spread out, as though he admired the pattern. Then, as though he decided suddenly that it was not Saint Veronica's, he availed himself of it as a resource of civilisation, and returned it resolutely to his pocket. We are not responsible for this gentleman's actions, and can only record, without explanation, that he then said quite distinctly, "Pum, pum, pum!" and slapped his hands heavily together. He added: "Time's gettin' on"—a remark equally true of all periods. Then he listened to the voices of the two ladies returning down the stairs.

"Oh no!—you needn't be the *least* afraid about John. He's discretion itself in a thing of this sort. And you'll see it will be just as I say. When your dear husband comes back it will all be *exactly* the same, and..." Here her voice dropped, and John listened hard, but missed a great deal.... "So now, dear, you will promise to be quite happy about it, and not let yourself fret. Won't you?"

"But, Charlotte dear, it's all about *nothing*...."

"That's the right view to take, dear. That's just exactly what it *is*—all about nothing! Now let's try and



be happy, and not think about it. John!—where are you? Do come and let's be off! I hope it isn't raining."

"Pavement was dry enough when *I* came in," was Mr. Eldridge's testimony. To corroborate it he went out in the front garden and gazed upwards, open-mouthed. "Oh no—*it's* not raining, fast enough," said he. Which seemed to imply that perhaps something else was.

Marianne went back into her parlour and rang the bell for Elizabeth Barclay to come and take away the tea-things, because Harmood was out for her holiday. She looked and felt flushed and irritated, but could not have said whether it was with Charlotte Eldridge, with herself, or with this showy girl at Royd. With all her stupidity—and she had plenty—she was not wanting in loyalty to her husband; although it may be a good deal of this loyalty was only a form "proper pride"—that is to say, *amour propre*—took. How one wonders that commonplace, uninteresting people should have any *amour propre*—should love those insipid selves of theirs at all! But they have it—the dullest of them.

As she sat there in the growing dusk, watching the slow-combustion stove economizing its coal, and making attempts to consume its own smoke, her soul was doing battle on its own behalf against the insidious siren Jealousy, who came and came and came again each time she thrust her contemptuously away. Had she, perhaps, despised her a little too roundly when her first whispers were audible? Had she treated them too much as an absurdity when her husband's first great success had been followed by a sudden uplifting of him into a world she resented—resented because the only part she could play in it had been a very minor one? Had she taken it too easily for granted that no harm would come if he went his way and she hers—she, who didn't mean to be patronised, whoever else did! Might it not have been really wiser to brace herself up to the bearing of one or two slights and humiliations, to laugh them off and acknowledge that a homely, uneducated woman of her sort must needs fall contentedly into a back rank, rather than to

refuse indignantly to march with the army at all? *She* was not going to be tolerated, and made allowances for, not she!—that was her attitude. That Arkroyd woman would have been just civil to her in time, no doubt; but how about all the affronts and indignities she would have had to put up with during apprenticeship? No—it was best as it was: Titus to go his way and she hers! Besides, her being constantly watching him would do no good, if there *were*—that is to say, if there *had been*—any truth in this nonsense of Charlotte's. But, really, it was all so idiotic. As if she couldn't trust Titus for five minutes away from her apron-strings! Of course, Titus was to be trusted! . . . Was he?

She got up and walked about the room in the flickering firelight, conscious of her heart-beats, and half-inclined to cry, if she could have chosen. But her eyes felt dry over it, as a matter of fact. She caught herself beginning to feel angry with Titus, convicted herself of it, and reprimanded the culprit severely. Idiot that she was, to be affected by mere unfounded gabble! For she was far from believing, all the while, that Charlotte had any faith in her own insinuations. She fully recognised that her friend's pleasure in dwelling on the constructive relations of Paul and Virginia, Paolo and Francesca, Adam and Eve, for that matter—anywhom male and female, anywhere—was only human sympathy, leavened with hysteria. Had she not helped her, *lubens et ex animo*, when the improper study of mankind seemed good to their hours of leisure? The study, that is, of man and woman-kind in braces, selected by the student? But when the model suggested for study was her own husband, in leash with a strange young lady, whom she had not seen, she felt the position of a philosophical analyst uncongenial.

Why could she not be angry with Charlotte? That might have seemed the most natural safety-valve. Marianne had never read "Othello"—or much to speak of else—but she had seen it at the play. So she may easily have recalled Iago's cautions against the green-eyed monster that doth make the meat it feeds on, and compared it with the way her friend had somehow contrived



to appear a warning voice, crying beware ! to a suspicious soul adrift in a wilderness of its own unreason. She was not so very unlike the Moor in her ready acceptance of the character *her* Iago had claimed for herself. Of course, Charlotte was a fool, and fanciful ; but, equally of course, she was no mischief-maker. Why, see what a perfect faith she had in Titus's integrity ! Marianne was angry with herself for allowing a doubt of it, without having the shrewdness to see that she never would have felt one if it had not been for Charlotte. In fact, left to herself in the growing darkness, to brood over her own scarcely fledged suspicion, she could not for the life of her have said what on earth began it all. She forgot all details of her conversation with Charlotte, and only knew that something in it had made her feel very uncomfortable.

Really, one is sometimes inclined to believe that imps of darkness hang about, to run and help whenever they see a little bit of mischief brewing.

## CHAPTER X

MARIANNE'S loving Tite did not come back at the time he had appointed—not by many days. He postponed doing so in order to go back on the same day as Mr. Brownrigg, whose society he had begun to find rather amusing. Their departure together was again postponed in order that they might travel up in company with William Rufus and Lord Felixthorpe, with whom both had come to be on the best of terms, after each had denounced either to the other, in the strictest confidence, as purse-proud, rank-proud, toffish, and standoffish. They had collated their respective observations of the ingrained vices of Aristocracy, and found that they agreed. But, then, after they had unpacked their hearts with unprejudiced and candid criticism, they had suddenly *volte face'd*, and discerned that there was always a Something you could not define about people of this sort. They had both noticed this singular fact, and each was supplied by it with an insight into the unusual powers of penetration of the other. It was a curious coincidence that both had acquired a consciousness of this Something by comparing the courteous demeanour and graceful hospitality of their host with what they found it impossible to describe as anything but the Plebeian Vulgarity of the sitting Conservative member for the borough. Mr. Ramsay Tomes caught it hot. Then look at the indescribable grace of Lady Arkroyd, and contrast it with the dowdy *personnel* and awkward manners of the political gentleman's wife. Why!—*there* was a woman, her ladyship to wit, who could be as rude as she pleased to anyone, and the indefinable Something came in and carried it off!

Was it the indefinable Something, or a very easily definable Nothing-of-the-Sort, that brought about a still further delay in Alfred Challis's return home? Probably



the latter, in the form of the gradual cordiality that comes to folk living in the same house under auspicious circumstances, and goes on growing till quarrelling time. It was of less importance when once he had overstayed his return-ticket; and the final outcome of two or three postponements, each to await a reinforcement to the homeward-bound Londoners, was that the bulk of the Royd house-party caught the two o'clock train ten days behind the date of Mr. Challis's promised return to his domestic hearth, and arrived at Euston in a drizzling mist, which knew that summer had gone, and had the atmosphere all to itself.

The porter that carried his portmanteau and his game—a hare and partridges, with which was associated a promise of pheasants next month—to a four-wheeler, might have noticed that the literary-looking gentleman and the good-looking young lady in blue said good-bye a great deal—in fact, until a carriage called out to know whether the latter was coming or not. But this porter's name was Onions, and he had no soul, except one that was wrapped up in remuneration. So he accepted fourpence and saw nothing.

But he might have. And also he might have heard the following conversation between the good-looking—or best-looking—young lady and the gentleman, after the latter had made sure that his selected four-wheeler was prepared to go as far as Wimbledon.

“Now, Mr. Challis, I know you're not to be trusted to give my message to your wife. . . .”

“Yes, I am. She's to write you a line to say when she'll be at home.”

“Stupid man! Now you know quite well it was nothing as bold as that. No, dear Mr. Challis, tell her I don't want to make a formal ‘call.’ I want to know her—as well as I know you. And I never shall unless we see each other quietly, when there's no one else there. Oh dear!—if only people I want to know would give me a cup of tea and say ‘not at home’ to everyone else!”

“I should myself! But I quite understand. I'll wrap up the message to Marianne exactly to that effect. She shall write and fix a day. And I'm not to be there—that's it, isn't it?”

"That's it. Good man! And you understand that I'm entirely in earnest about Aminta Torrington—(all right! Nobody can hear. They're all in the carriage)—and you're to speak to Mr. Magnus at the Megatherium about it."

"Oh yes! I'm going to speak. Honour bright!"

"Very well, then! Now good-bye, Mr. Challis."

"Good-bye. I *have* had a pleasant time." But Mr. Onions heard none of this, as, while he was disposing of the portmanteau, his attention was engaged by conversation with the cabman.

"Where's Wimbledon, Honey?" the latter had said, as he took the box from him. He seemed over-ripe, did this cabman. He could not fall off the box, though, for he had bound himself to it by tarpaulins of an inflexible nature. "Honey" was not Irish: it was short for "Onions."

"What's the use of askin' me, when you know yourself? Mean to say you don't?"

"I was born there, my son. I've lived there ever since. Likewise, I'm going to hend my days there, exceptin' I should 'appen to live for ever. I was just a-puttin' the question to see if *you* knew."

"Couldn't say to harf an inch where it is. But it's a place *you* get a pint at, every wisit."

"Right you are, my son! . . . All right, governor—just off, as soon as these cloths are tucked in. You never mentioned any 'urry, or I'd have seen to it!"

And then Royd and its luxurious life have finally vanished, and every day life has come back, as the cab growls through its rather long ride. Challis was paying the penalty of coming home by a different route, and now almost wished he hadn't made up his mind to cab the whole way. But you know what it is when you have a large portmanteau that won't go on a hansom.

If it had not been for the hare and partridges, he could have managed to consider the whole thing a dream. This would have been an advantage; for no one stickles at finding waking life dull after a fascinating sleep-experience. Do not we all rather love to rub it into our waking surroundings how sweet that place was in the dream, how bright those skies and seas were, how lovable that—well,



usually—person of the opposite sex was? Are you, if you are a lady, prepared to deny this last item? Not that this concerns the story, for there they were—the hare and partridges. And the memories they brought back clashed with the long perspectives of street-lamps in the drizzle, and the reflections of them; and the male umbrellas and female umbrellas bobbing endlessly past below them, or waiting for a bus that somebody may get out of, just there; and the busses that stopped to shed their passengers and fill up again with Heaven-favoured fresh ones—while they, the umbrellas, waited—and made the hearts of those no umbrella could keep dry sick with Hope deferred. This hare and partridges, fur-soft and feather-soft, though cold to the touch, were full of suggestions of the life that had been switched off finally just now at Euston Station. But then, of course—Challis ought to have recollected this, and he felt it—they were equally full of suggestion of where they were going to be devoured. Was he not going home to Marianne, and the children, and his snug little writing-room looking out on the Common across the garden, where he was on no account to be disturbed? The very word “home” had a magic in it, and so forth: consult Literature, *passim*! . . .

No, really, it was too absurd to allow his nasty cynical tone to creep into his thoughts—here in Hyde Park; for that was the Marble Arch, and the cab was making a good record—when in less than an hour he would be back among his Lares and Penates. As he got nearer home he found that the fire of pleasurable anticipation he had lighted began to crackle and burn up of its own accord, without further effort on his part. How he wished he could invent a word for that confounded hypothetical wickedness—treachery or what not—that nervous imaginatives impute to themselves, knowing its unreality all the while!

He had never allowed himself to believe for one moment that Royd owed any of its charm for him to anything but . . . well!—a sort of general summary of the charms of a big wealthy country-house full of pleasant people with balances at their Bankers’. So he expressly vetoed the idea that in the dream he was now waking from, as he

neared The Hermitage and Marianne, there was any one individual that played a predominant part. He vetoed it in obedience to that groundless guilt of conscience he was going to find a name for. But for that he would have let it alone.

He would have to find that name, to brand the intolerable nuisance; to denounce it by it, when it appeared. Then he might look it in the face unflinchingly, when it told him to snub his memory for remembering so vividly the sunset-glow on his companion's face, that day they walked back from the Rectory. What a luxury it would be to give this phenomenon its proper place! As, for instance, Mental Astigmatism—something of that sort! The more syllables the better! Let him see!—didn't *aischune* in Greek mean disgrace, or guilt? How would *pseudæschynomorphism* serve the turn? Long enough, anyhow, to convince a Grand Jury. . . .

Well, it was this—no need to say the long name every time; at least, until the Jury should be empanelled!—that was galling the kibe of his mind at every chance thought of Judith Arkroyd that came into it. Why, in Heaven's name, should he not dwell with pleasure on her eyes, which were public property; on her lips, which he did not propose to interfere with; on the touch of her hand at parting, which, by-the-bye, had gone the round of the male units as the party broke up? He was not going to appropriate a larger share than Felixthorpe, for instance, whom he thought a very nice chap; or Brownrigg, for that matter! Or . . . but no!—one must draw a line somewhere. Let Mr. Ramsay Tomes keep his fat hand to himself! At which point Pseudetcetera—(that would do for the present)—said aloud: "Come, Alfred Challis, what business have you with the word *desecration* in your mind in connection with this part of the business?" He rebuked the phenomenon, giving it its name in full.

He was no match for it, though; and it ended by scoring. "Should I be here at all," it said, "if Marianne were . . .?" He brushed the question aside, but his heart knew the end of it. Marianne wasn't. . . .

However, it was all Pseudetcetera, anyhow! Judith Arkroyd was cultivating him from a purely selfish motive—



this rather bitterly ; and as for Marianne, was he not really glad to be back again, and wouldn't it be a pleasure to . . . to present her with the hare and partridges, and facilitate the housekeeping ?

As to Miss Arkroyd's proposal to call, he did not know how it would be received. Perhaps he would have to tell Marianne that she really must be a sensible woman, and a Woman of the World.

Anyhow—and he drifted into a self-interested channel with some sense of relief—it would never do to have what might be a golden prospect for his play thwarted. He had only imperfect means, so far, of guessing what Judith would sound like behind the footlights ; but as to what she would *look* like, that was a thing there could be *no* misgiving about. . . . Why !—the horse was walking. Actually, Putney Hill ! What a much better lot of four-wheelers had come on the streets lately ! In a quarter of an hour he would be at home ; and really very glad—honour bright !—to be back with Marianne.

When any lady or gentleman comes back from an absence, in a cab with luggage on it—however passionate may have been her or his longing for a corresponding him or her who may have been (or might have been) watching at the door for its arrival, or however much the two of them may feel disposed to

“ Stand tranced in long embraces  
Mixt with kisses sweeter, sweeter  
Than anything on earth ”—

they usually find, in practice, that it is necessary to stand matters over, because of the cab. This does not, of course, apply to where a man-servant is kept, who can pay fares dogmatically, and conduct himself like the Pope in Council. But where the yearnings of both parties have to be suppressed all through a discussion of the fare and a repulse of the unemployed, whose services have been anticipated by your own mercenaries . . . well !—do what you will in the way of cordiality afterwards, it *is* chilling, and you can't deny it. We know we are putting this in a very homely way, but this is a very homely subject.

If that over-ripe cabman had shown a different spirit, and accepted the shilling or so too much that Challis offered him, and gone his way in silence, who knows what course events would have taken in the Challis household? But he not only said, "*My fare's nine shillings!*" but came down from his box as one comes down from a box when one's mind is thoroughly made up, and one ain't going to stand any more of one's ex-fare's trifling. He also unbuttoned a series of coats, and produced from his inner core a pocket-book, supposed to contain documentary evidence of some sort. It was eight mile o' ground, and three on 'em outside the radius. Challis was irritated at the low valuation put on his understanding by this cabman, and disputed a point he would have given way on had an appeal been made to the goodness of his heart to shut his eyes to obvious truth in the interest of extortion. He was also obsessed by a woe-begone creature who had run all the way from Putney Bridge to assist with the one portmanteau, but had been headed off by Martha and Elizabeth Barclay. Who, thus intercepted, had substituted a moral claim on account of the distance no one had asked him to cover for a legal claim for carrying a portmanteau into a house, and making the latter smell of his wardrobe till properly aired and the mats shook next day. The consequence of which was that, when the cabman had reconstituted himself on his box, under protest, and departed, Challis, eager to make up for the postponement of his greeting by a good husbandly *accolade*, found himself met by, "As soon as you've done with the man!" and, turning, perceived an injured being touching a soaked cap, and awaiting recognition or execration in a spirit of meekness, but quite determined not to go away without a settlement.

"Run all the way from Putney, have you? What the devil did you do it for? Nobody asked you." Here a gratuity, of coppers.

"Won't you make it up a shillin', Captain? It is 'ard, when a man's been out all day looking for a chance, and walked all over Battersea and Chelsea and round Brixton—ask anybody if I ain't!—and nobody to 'elp me to a job or say the word for me. . . . Thank ye kindly, Captain!"—



here more coppers ; this mode of address proving irresistible—"only if it was made up to a shillin' I could get my tools out of pawn, being a carpenter by trade. . . ."

Challis pushed the door to in the man's face with something like an oath. Then at last he got a moment's leisure for his overdue kiss, which he paid liberally, as he said : " Well, it is jolly to be back, at any rate ! How are the kids ?" For, whatever the malady he had made the awkward name for had been, he wasn't going to show any consciousness of it.

" The children you mean ? There's nothing the matter with them that I know of. Now make haste ; because it's a small leg. If I'd thought you were going to be so late it could have been rumpsteak."

Challis looked at his watch. " H'm !" said he. Which meant that seven-forty was not so enormously late, and really more elastic arrangements might have been contrived. " I shouldn't have time for a warm bath, should I ?"

" I must tell Elizabeth Barclay, then. I dare say she can keep the meat back. Only say !"

" Oh, it don't matter, if there's any difficulty. . . ."

" My dear !—why should there be any difficulty ! You've only got to *say*. . . . Well !—am I to tell Elizabeth Barclay, or am I not ?"

Challis decided, and said. That is, he did not formulate special instructions, his words being merely, " Half-past, then. I'll be sure not to be later," and went straight away to get a bath. It is the greatest of luxuries, as we all know, after a journey, and Challis had made up his mind to have one the moment he detected a flavour of roasting, because that implied plenty of hot water in the bath-room.

Those who measure events only by the bounce they manifest—by their rapidity, or unexpectedness, or by the clamour that accompanies them—will wonder why any narrator of a story should think such flat incident worth recording. But observe !—it was the very flatness of this conversation that gave it its importance, coming as it did on the top of the exhilaration of Mr. Challis's visit, and his parting with that large and lively company of friends less than two hours ago. It has its place—this flatness has

—in the lives of these two folk we write of, and really accelerates the story, although it is certainly slow in itself.

How very much Challis would have preferred it if his wife had said, “I won’t kiss you if you swear,” and had then done it *quand même*! His mind—a fictionmonger’s—reconstructed his reception with things more palatable for Marianne to say, this one among them. Another thing he would have liked, quite inexplicably, was, “Well!—how’s the fascinating Judith?” Possibly this was because he would have welcomed help from without to convince him he was indifferent about the young woman. The answer he imagined for himself, which would have been pleasant for him to give, was, “She’s coming to see you next week, Polly Anne. So get your best bib and tucker ready!” But there had been none of this, nor the laughter—purely imaginary—that he garnished it with. Only the flatness, as recorded.

“Perhaps it was all that confounded cabman,” said Challis to himself and a bath-towel like a *toga*, after a very respectable warm bath—not equal to that at Royd, though—and a cold douche. He had to hurry up to keep his word at half-past eight. But he kept it.

“Well!” said he, as he joined his wife in the drawing-room, where she was awaiting the announcement of dinner, Challis conceived.

“Well what?” She touched the nearest bell-handle. “They’ll know it’s for dinner,” she said, and the remark seemed relative. “Why well?”

“Well everything! Tell me all about the kids, about who’s called, about where you’ve been, about everything. Come, Polly Anne, I think you might unbutton a little and be jolly when a chap’s been away three weeks. How are John and Charlotte Eldridge?”

“Yes!—I think you might have asked about them. John has been at death’s door. There’s dinner!...” Challis made a sympathetic noise about Mr. Eldridge, but postponed inquiry. Nothing made it easy until he found himself a lonely soup-consumer; because, you see, Marianne wasn’t hungry.

“What has it been?” Too concise, perhaps. But



really death's door, with John on the step, had been the last thing mentioned.

"What has what been?"

"What you told me. What's been the matter with John?"

"Peritonitis. But he's going on well now. Dr. Kitt says he'll have to live very carefully for some time. . . . I know what you mean, but it's very unfeeling to laugh. Besides, I don't believe he eats more than other people." Challis felt indefensible. Just fancy!—there he was, eating gravy soup all by himself!

"I wasn't laughing, old girl," said he. "Poor Jack Eldridge! Peritonitis is no joke. I'll go round to-morrow."

"It won't be any use. He won't be able to see you. Yes—you can take the soup, Harmood. Mr. Challis isn't going to have any more. . . ."

A mere rough sample of the conversation. It was not unlike others of the same sort on like occasions. But was Challis wrong in imagining that, this time, it was a little accentuated? Was it only his imagination, gathering suggestions from the atmosphere that his home had been that of self-denying endurance during his absence, and that his own selfish indulgences elsewhere were being actively forgiven for his sake? What had he done to deserve forgiveness? If he had known that he was incurring it, would he have committed the offence at all?

Also he did feel that Marianne hadn't played fair. What could have been more genial than her send-off, three weeks ago?—more apparently genuine than her refusal to accompany her husband to Royd on the ground of a real dislike for Society? To be sure, a throb of conscience reminded him of a certain breath of relief—almost—that he drew at the decisiveness of this refusal. Had Marianne been sharp enough to see it? His instinct told him that a woman might have a sharp department in her mind on points of this sort, and yet make a poor show in logic and mental philosophy.

The sense that he was a naughty boy that had been eating three-cornered jam-tarts, and giving no one else any, hung about him, and made him unlike himself. If only that abominable cabman had not spoiled the part he had sketched out for himself on his first arrival, one of

exaggerated self-denunciation for his beastly selfishness, and tragi-comical commiseration for Marianne as Penelope or Andromeda ! It would then have come so much easier to deliver that message from Judith Arkroyd. And now ! Just look at *now* ! Now, when he actually found himself fallen so low as to half-ask if he might smoke in the drawing-room ! Not quite, of course ; that would have been too absurd ! But he said something or other, or Marianne would not have replied as she did.

“ As if I ever minded ! How can you be so ridiculous ! ” This was good and lubricative. But she spoilt it by adding that there was the little ash-pan. Nevertheless, by the time the incense from her husband’s cigar, and an atmosphere of consolatory coffee, were bringing back the flavour of a thousand and one post-prandial hours of peace in days gone by, the malignant influence of that cabman began to lose its force, and there was concession in the way she added : “ I suppose you weren’t allowed to smoke in the drawing-room at Boyd’s—Royd’s—whatever it was ? ”

“ Royd. Cigarettes—yes ! Hardly cigars. At least, nobody did it. The young women smoked cigarettes. ”

“ Those sort of people do it now. At least, Charlotte Eldridge says so. *I don’t know.* ”

“ Wish you’d smoke, Polly Anne ! Have a cigarette now. ”

“ Oh no !—I’ve tried often enough to know I don’t like it. You must go away to some of your Grosvenor Squares if you’re not happy smoking by yourself. ”

Things were pleasanter. Why couldn’t Challis let it alone, instead of at once discerning an opportunity of delivering Judith’s message ? To say, as he did, “ No—I’ve had enough of the Grosvenor Squares for some time to come, ” wasn’t unblemished truth, but it was an excusable stepping-stone under the circumstances, with poor dear slow Polly Anne waiting for consolation. The mistake was in what followed. Our own belief is he would have done much better to make a forget of that message until his life was running again in a married channel. He began badly for one thing. You should never say “ By-the-bye ! ” in order to introduce the thing uppermost in your mind.

“ By-the-bye, Polly Anne, it won’t do to forget that the



young female Grosvenor Square wants to call on you.” To this Marianne made no answer, and her husband had to add : “ Miss Arkroyd—Judith !”

It became difficult not to answer. Marianne fidgeted. “ I suppose she’ll have to come,” she said.

“ Well !—I suppose so.” There was a shade of asperity in this. But what followed softened it. “ You know, really, Polly Anne darling, you’ll have to put up with the fascinating Judith a little, for the sake of the play. Besides, she sent you such a very nice message.”

“ Very kind of her !” However, Mrs. Challis has quite her share of human inquisitiveness, and if she wants to hear the message after her sardonic speech, she must make concession. “ What *was* the very nice message ?” she asks grudgingly.

Perhaps Challis’s powers of fiction made him able to imagine exactly how he would have behaved if Judith Arkroyd had been merely a showy, smart-set sort of a girl—or merely an intelligent young woman, without a figure to speak of—or, still more merely, one of those excruciating well-informed persons of importance phrenologically, but with no figure at all. On this occasion he felt he knew exactly what his conduct would have been had he undertaken an embassy from the merest of these three—the last. And he modelled his conduct accordingly.

“ Don’t be miffy with the poor woman, Polly Anne,” said he. He had thought of “ poor girl,” but decided on something bonier, with hair brushed on to the shape of the head, and a black dress. This refers, of course, to the provisional lay-figure he elected to give his message from.

“ The poor woman !” Marianne repeated, looking rather suspicious over it. But the image of the lay-figure in his mind, telepathically communicated, produced a certain softening, so he thought. He moved from the bent wood rocking-chair he was smoking in to the sofa beside his wife.

“ I’ll tell you exactly her message word for word,” he said. He did so, as from the lay-figure. And, indeed, he almost wished that fiction had been a reality, as far as this message went. He could have sketched out the proposed visit so much more easily, in his inmost mind ; which was,

to say truth, incredulous about its turning out satisfactory to either lady, their respective personalities being as supplied.

"I suppose she'll have to come," said Marianne drearily. "Why can't she come when other people are here?"

"Because she wants to see *you*, my dear. She doesn't want to see the other people."

"Why need I be in it at all? Can't you introduce her to Mr. Magnus, and let them settle it between them?" For in his last letter Challis had enlarged on the Aminta Torrington scheme, and his wife was quite *au fait* of the position so far.

He hummed and hawed, and flushed slightly. The removal of a column of ash from his cigar seemed to absorb him for a moment. "I don't think you quite see all the ins and outs of the situation, Polly Anne. Don't you understand? . . ."

"Understand what?"

"Well—I'm sure Miss Arkroyd really wishes to know you. You see, I've talked so much about you." This was not really a *true* truth, for conversation about Marianne had always been at Judith's instigation. "But there are other considerations, apart from that. . . ."

"What considerations?"

"Well, you know, we *do* live in a world! Don't we now, Polly Anne?"

"I thought it was something of that sort. Charlotte Eldridge said it would be."

"What did Charlotte Eldridge say? I wish she'd keep her tongue to herself. . . ."

"But you're getting angry before you know what she *did* say."

"No, I'm not! I mean I'm not getting angry at all. Why should I get angry? Come, old girl, be reasonable! What did Charlotte Eldridge say?" Nevertheless, it is clear that Mr. Challis is keeping his temper—keeping it admirably, perhaps, but still, keeping it! His wife's answer shows painfully how well she is keeping hers.

"Charlotte Eldridge said I should be wanted the moment I told her about Aminta Torrington. . . . No!—it's no use pretending, Tite! . . . Besides, I'm *not* hurt. Why should



I be ? Only I don't see why there need be a make-believe friendship between me and this young lady—and me to have to put on my black silk, and a new Madeira cake—and to give Harmood directions to say not at home ! Charlotte Eldridge and I have talked it all over. . . .”

“ Oh !—you've talked it all over ?” Challis either is, or pretends to be, inclined to laugh.

“ Yes, we have. And you know how sensible Charlotte is about things of this sort. . . . No, Titus, you can try to make what I say ridiculous, and I dare say you'll succeed, but you know what a good friend Charlotte has been to me from the beginning. . . .” Marianne pulls up short suddenly in the middle of her speech, with a suggestion in it of a tear corked in at its source. She gets the cork well in, and ends with : “ I won't say any more about it. You shall arrange it just as you like your own way ”—but this with the amenability of a traction-engine making concession to its handle.

Challis, who had felt it rather hard that a tearfulness derived from tender memories of Mrs. Eldridge's loyalty in past years should slop over into his department, became awake to the fact that brisk strategy would be needed to prevent that cork coming out. “ Come, I say now, Polly Anne !” said he with jovial remonstrance. “ Fancy you and me falling out about a Grosvenor Square young lady !” He burst out laughing, roundly. “ We *have* shot up in the world. My word !” He got his arm round an unresponsive invertebrate waist, in spite of a collision with a hook, which rather took the edge off his caress. Why cannot ladies have some sort of little smooth tie, just at that point, in case ? It was a very slight blot on the scutcheon, however, and, indeed, would have counted for nothing with Challis had not Marianne offered him her mole to kiss instead of her lips. For she had a mole—a small one, certainly—just on the cheek-bone. Now a liberal, unreserved warmth in this act of the drama would have been invaluable. It would have helped Challis to snap his fingers at whatever it was that was taunting him with having effected for politic purposes a half-derision of Judith as a Grosvenor Squarian—and that, too, after the cordial message to his wife !

However, it was quite impossible to pretend—it would not be fair to say admit—that they were quarrelling, after that. In fact, it was so established an assumption that their old confidence was again on its old footing, that Challis felt it would be ungenerous to Marianne to change the subject for safety's sake. Besides, he wanted an answer to a question.

“ You didn't tell me what it was Charlotte *did* say, Polly Anne. . . . I dare say she was all right, you know.” The use of her Christian name alone was a concession—showed good-will. Speech is full of such niceties.

Marianne got up and broke a coal on the fire. She couldn't think of two things at once, naturally. This made a pause before answering, and a pretence of having omitted an answer because of the slightness of its subject was plausible.

“ Oh—Charlotte ? It really was the merest talk by the way. She only said it would keep people from talking nonsense.”

“ What would ? ”

“ If the Grosvenor Square young lady and I were bosom friends. She was joking, you know.”

“ I see what she meant,” said Challis ; and seemed to, reflectively. But really he was crossing Mrs. Eldridge out of one or two passages in his good books where her name still occurred. Confound her ! Couldn't she leave it to *him* to instruct Marianne—who was much too slow to find out anything for herself—on this point ? However, it was best to confirm her, on the whole. He continued : “ Of course, if it were thought that you and she were at daggers drawn, spiteful people would say things. They always do if they get a chance. But what I look at is that she *is* Aminta Torrington. It's quite miraculous. You never saw anything so happy.” He quite forgot that lay-figure.

Marianne waived discussion of the dramatic aspect of the question. She knew nothing about these things—was an outsider. But she seemed to register concession on the main point. She supposed the young woman must come, and she could tell Charlotte and Maria Macculloch and Louis Smithson to be sure not to call that day, and then Harmood could say “ not at home.” Better make it Thursday, and get it over.



"Didn't Charlotte say anything else?" This was chiefly conciliation on Challis's part. He did not wish to seem in a hurry to get away from Mrs. Eldridge, or to resent her discussion of his affairs.

"Oh—she *talked*, of course! You mean when I saw her yesterday? Only she was still so anxious about John."

"He'll be all right, won't he? Did you say peritonitis? Are you sure? Because peritonitis is the dooce's own delight."

"The doctor says there is no occasion for the slightest uneasiness." Whereupon Challis settled in his own mind that John Eldridge would be spared to his wife and relatives, for the present at any rate. Peritonitis inside a week, and no need for uneasiness at the end of it! He allowed the medical report to lapse, and referred again to what Charlotte had said. It certainly seemed, to judge by Marianne's reply, "I thought she was quite mistaken, you know," that Charlotte *had* "talked, of course," although she *was* so uneasy about John.

"What about?" But he didn't want to seem to catechize, so he discovered that his cigar—which he was quite half through—didn't draw well, and lit another. Then he was able to say, "Let's see!—what were we talking about? What Charlotte said." He resumed his place beside his wife, too manifestly to receive the answer for her to withhold it.

"It was only general conversation, about what Miss Arkroyd's family—with all their ideas—would think of her going on the stage."

"My dear! I must say I do wish you hadn't mentioned Miss Arkroyd to her at all. I hope you made her understand she must be quiet about it?"

"Oh, *she* won't mention it—except perhaps to John." Challis looked alarmed. However, John couldn't talk much at present, even if peritonitis only meant obstruction. "Besides, I didn't really tell her anything. It was an accident. I showed her something else in your letter a week ago, and by the merest chance she read it by mistake. It wasn't her fault."

"Nor yours. I see! But what did she read?"

"Only where you said you would have to talk to the old

boy about his daughter's stage-mania . . . nothing that could possibly do any harm."

Now, Challis's conscience had been uneasy about the part he was going to play in helping Judith towards a secret arrangement which was sure to outrage the feelings of her family. So, when he said "Oh!" to this, he had to jump abruptly on to make it seem a casual, ordinary "Oh!" He succeeded pretty well. "What was Charlotte's idea?" said he.

"The same idea, of course. As long as Sir Thingummy knew all about it, no one could possibly blame *you*."

"I don't know that it's really my concern. I don't know that it's any of our . . ." A pause here is due to his duty to syntax. . . . "I mean to say—that it is the business of any one of us. Miss Arkroyd is no chicken. In fact, I'm not sure that her age won't stand in her way—for training, I mean. However, of course I shall take care that her family knows all about it." Challis's voice sounded well in his own ears, and he was convinced that no fault could be found with his behaviour so far. As to anyone saying he should not have made the promise about Mr. Magnus of the Megatherium while he was a trusted guest at Royd, that was sheer nonsense. He felt quite nettled with Marianne for saying, "Oh, haven't you done it?" But he wasn't going to prolong discussion about it.

He felt nettled, too, with himself for feeling, when Marianne left him to read, before going to bed, the letters that had come for him—with a charge to him not to make a noise when he came up—nettled for feeling that he had got through the evening well, which was absurd; and that to do so he had assumed a certain roughness in reference to Judith, to accentuate his equable indifference to her personally, which was absurder. What was it all about?—was the question he asked himself. And then another that arose from it naturally, What was *what* all about? The distraction afforded by a handful of miscellaneous correspondence gave him an excuse for ignoring the latter question, which, indeed, seemed to him the more unanswerable of the two.

One thing, however, he was glad of having achieved. Marianne would write that letter, he felt sure. Only he



would just keep his eye on her to see that she did it. He would not have to write to Judith, "Please don't come and see my wife!" in any form, transparent or otherwise.

For anything the story shows at this point, Alfred Challis and Marianne might have tided over any little difficulties arising out of the visit to Royd, if they had only been judiciously let alone. It was those blessed Peacemakers!

## CHAPTER XI

LIZARANN COUPLAND used to wonder how ever Daddy could go out in the cold and stop all day. It was noble of him to do so in the public service—that was how Lizarann thought of it. For she believed the insinuations embodied in song by “the boys” in Tallack Street to be malicious falsehoods, and as for “the boy” whose aunt sold fried eels and winkles next door to the shop where her father purchased his shaving-soap, she only hoped that a good basting her own aunt wished to give to the whole clan-jamfray of ’em—meaning boys generally—might be concentrated on the unsheltered person of this particular boy. She had improved her acquaintance with him, and had come to the conclusion that for presumption and self-conceit, for ill manners and very doubtful good feeling, that boy was without a parallel.

During the whole of this acquaintance it had never occurred to Lizarann to ask this boy’s name. And but yesterday she had committed the tactical error of surrendering her own christened name in exchange for peppermint drops. The moment of the present writing is a deadly afternoon in January, gettin’ on for four, but that dark you’ll have to light the gas in the end, and may just as well do it at once. The place is the one spoken of in an earlier chapter as Vatted Rum Corner, and that boy is a settin’ on the rilin’ eatin’ of four ’ot chestnuts off of Mrs. Groves’s bikin’ trye, for a ’ape’ny, and to be allowed to warm your fingers at the grite. He had had to make room for other customers.

Lizarann came up cold, and envied the feast. The boy was a self-indulgent boy, or seemed so. For he only said, “These four’s for me, bought and paid for, square. You git some for yourself, orf of Mother Groves. Two for a farden’s *your* figger, Aloyzer.” And then he sketched a



clog-dance on the hard-trodden snow of the pavement, with a mouth quite full of chestnuts.

Lizarann felt the heartlessness of his attitude. Yesterday he had cajoled her into an admission that her name was Lizarann by offering peppermint drops. Now he had nothing to gain by an offer of chestnuts, and kept them all himself! She happened to be in funds, and could have purchased four for a 'ape'ny, and in that case would as like as not have given that boy one, as an exemplar towards generosity. But at the moment a higher interest claimed her attention. He knew her name, and she didn't know his. An iniquity, clearly! How could she remedy it?

Now Lizarann had contrived, childwise, a curious idea about her name. It may have originated in a chant she herself had joined in frequently, merely for the sake of the music:

“Oh fie—fie for shame!  
Everybody knows your name.”

But it certainly had acquired its full force from an expression made use of by her Aunt Stingy, who had spoken of a young person as having “lost her good name.” What the young person was called by her friends, afterwards, was a problem Lizarann had given a good deal of thought to. And she was now unable to dissociate the young person's position altogether from her own. If her name had not been lost as a necessary implement of social intercourse with the world at large, it at least had been surrendered with no *per contra*, in the case of an immoral and worthless member of it. But she felt that, could she become possessed of *his* name, as a set-off, the balance of righteousness would be adjusted. And she was much more anxious about this than about the chestnuts.

“What's your nime?” said she, after self-commune which suggested no less trenchant way of approaching the subject.

The boy paused in the clog-dance. “Moses,” said he. And then went on as before.

“Nuffint elst no more than Moses?”

“That's tellin's.” The boy said this absently, and did some more steps. Then he simulated a graceful subsidence of the dance, ending in an attitude that seemed to acknow-

ledge the applause of a delighted throng. But a commercial possibility had presented itself. "What'll you stand," said he, "for to be told my name, and no lies?" This seemed mercenary; but then, had not Lizarann herself surrendered hers for a deal? Why condemn him?

No!—Lizarann lived in a glass house, and wouldn't throw stones. But she would make conditions. "Real nime all froo," she said. "Moses is lyin' stories!" For, you see, this was a crafty boy, and might consider the concession of a true surname alone would discharge his obligations under the contract.

"Then on'y Moses," said he; and began an encore—presumably, as it was the same dance. But he was not too preoccupied by it to take off the shell of his fourth chestnut, and when he had done so he smelt it, with disappointment. For it was mouldy. An idea struck him, and he acted on it.

"Marcy me, no!" said Mother Groves of the chestnuts when requested by him to 'and over a good un, fair and no cheating. "The riskis lies with the buyers. Where 'ud I be, in half the time, at that rate?"

"Then I'll 'ave the law of yer. Just see if I don't." He danced again, and this time his dance seemed to express confidence in his solicitor. But presently he stopped, and offered a composition: "You lookee here, Missis Groves," he said. "I'll 'and you back the mouldy one, onbit-into and closin' over the busted shell, acrost a clean new un, and I'll take another highp'orth off you, and pay square. If that ain't fair, nothin' ain't! But you got to look sharp, or the chance 'll be gone."

Mother Groves rejected the chance. "It ain't consideration enough to go again' the rules on, and me to take my 'ands out in the perishing cold. Make it a penn'orth and pick yourself, all exceptin' the three top."

"Hin't got no penny! Feel in my porket and see. It's open to yer to feel. There hin't no horbstickle. Here's a highp'ny and the bloomin' nut, shell and all. Mike your mind up!"

But Mrs. Groves's mind *was* made up, apparently. The boy then suggested that his motives had been the prosperity of trade, throughout; he was, in fact, or said he was, full up till dinner-time. He dined late, evidently.



At this point Lizarann made a proposal. She, too, had a halfpenny, and was ready to pool this halfpenny with the boy's, and give him sole enjoyment of the extra chestnut, but only on one condition. He must tell his name, and no lies. Thus approached, he said, "Git done talking then. Let's see 'em told out."

Mrs. Groves brought her hands out in the perishing cold—pathetic old hands, a young girl's once—and made two even groups of four nuts each. Then, leave being giv', the boy chose the compensation nut; only he took his time like a young 'Eathen as he was. Then Mrs. Groves, as assessor and umpire, required his name as a preliminary to final liquidation.

"'Orkins. Frederick. Frederick 'Orkins. Could have told yer it wasn't Moses any day of the week! 'And over!" And thereon he and Lizarann each had four bloomin' nuts, so 'ot you couldn't 'ardly 'andle 'em.

"I shall keep mine for my daddy, and keep 'em 'ot too," said Lizarann. She placed them nearest her heart, and felt that it was good to do so. They was a'most too 'ot, in the manner of speaking; but then a small undergarment protected her, when discreetly scroozled up fluffy.

"You best 'ide 'em well up," said Frederick Hawkins. "Here's a coarper comin' along! Don't you let 'em make no show, or he'll get his 'and on 'em."

But he only said this to perplex and annoy, and create unnecessary panic; and Lizarann knew that, every bit as well as we do. So she merely said: "Jimmy 'Acker can foight *you*," and enjoyed the warmth fearlessly. Her daddy's stick was not audible yet, coming along by the wall. He was late to-day. Lizarann's orders were to wait at the corner till she heard it, and then call "Pilot," that he might know she was waiting for him, and be happy. For he always had pangs of doubt that he might not meet her this time. Think of that little thing—for he knew how small she was still, by the feel, though there was no one to tell him what she was like to look at—think of her coming along that crowded street alone, to meet her daddy! She for her part had no misgivings about *his* coming. "Never you fear for me, lassie," he had said. And *he* knew, Law bless you!

"I'll Jimmy 'Acker 'im !'" said Frederick Hawkins boastfully. "I could 'tend on two like 'im at wunst. How old do you make him ?" Which showed the vain-gloriousness of his character, for clearly he knew nothing about Jimmy Hacker.

Lizarann couldn't commit herself to the age of the latter. But she could to his bulk and prowess. "He's thicker than you," she said, and added, with recollection of a combatant defeated by Jimmy Hacker : "He can foight a boy twelve next birthday."

"Then he ain't any so much to count on. I don't go by ages. Weights is what I go by. Any number o' stun I can foight, up to eight stun seven. You tell 'im to keep indoors, or I'll fetch him somethin' for to rek'lect me by. You see !"

But Mother Groves interposed to rebuke and check this inflated and defiant spirit. "Don't you pay no attention to that boy, my dear," said she to Lizarann. "He's that full of lip there's no placin' no reliance on a word he says. If I was his mother I should know just where he wanted a good canin'. Ah !—and he'd get it too, night or mornin'. A young cocksparrer I call him, and if he don't come by a bad end it'll be a moral. Ah !—wait till I find out where your mother lives, and see." Mrs. Groves worked rising indignation into her speech, after the manner of her class—Even so the Choctaw or Cherokee stimulates himself to battle-point. But Frederick Hawkins remained unmoved. He knew the old woman couldn't ketch holt upon him. He became most offensive, assuming a nasal drone with an approach to a chant.

"I got a widdered mother. She keeps a fish-shop. And I ain't a-goin', neither, for to tell you where." He threw a reminiscence of his previous dance into this.

Now Lizarann knew perfectly well that the fish-shop was next door to where her daddy bought his shaving-soap. But she wasn't going to tell. No nice little boy or girl ever tells. The particulars kept back on principle may relate to young cock-sparrows on whom no reliance can be placed, or to mere heathens—as in the present instance—but as for acquaintin' their parents, guardians, or other responsible grown-up persons, what they done, or anything likely to



lead to conviction—who ever heard of such a thing? Even the London servant class retains this one trace of an honourable usage. It won't tell.

Mother Groves merely referred to the ease of discovering fish-shops; especially when localised, as this one practically was, by the constant presence round her corner of a heathen residing there. She then gave all her attention to the conservation of vital heat; and it was needed, for her poor old clothes were thin on her poor old body. It wasn't 'ardly a reg'lar bad day, not to call it so, but it was a frost that was going to give a lift to the plumbin' trade, and do a rare lot of good that way. For the only good that can come now to this world is evidently through the destruction of something it has worked at the making of in years past, in order that people who have little may have to pay people who have less to do a bit of repairs to it, so that it won't want no lookin' to again, not yet awhile.

Can we wonder?—we who have read, for instance, of the revived prosperity of ship-building, shown by the putting down on the stocks of several new . . . destroyers? But never mind this!—pardon it and get back to the story and the degrees of frost at Vatted Rum Corner.

It wasn't so bad then, not when once you was out in it; it had been a tidy sight worse two days ago, afore it froze so hard underfoot; why—the busses couldn't keep goin', and a 'orse fell down so soon as ever you got him on his feet! And as for cabs, they wouldn't set foot outside of the yard, because where was the use? You couldn't stiddy yourself on your feet, not unless there was cenders on the track, or thored with boiling water.

Lizarann bore it bravely, in spite of chilblains and a blue complexion. Frederick Hawkins was blue; but either his heathenism or some other attribute enabled him to bear the cold defiantly. "It ain't freezin' here," said he, denying the obvious. "Hicey cold it was Bart'sey Park Sunday. The hice makes it cold 'acos of the skatin'." And Lizarann accepted this view of cause and effect. She might have disputed it had she not been beginning to feel uneasy about her daddy.

"Why, child, don't ye go along to'ards meetin' him? He'll be comin', I lay." Thus Mother Groves. And the

boy added : " Why don't yer 'ook it along down to the Rilewe, to see for yourself ? You 'ook it ! 'Ook it orf ! I'm tellin' of yer." But Lizarann only stood on her two feet alternately, and hugged the dying heat of the chestnuts. They wouldn't be no good for daddy. Alas !

" I was tolded not to it," said she. " Yass !"

Mrs. Groves approved. " Quite right, my dear, not to disobey your parents. But your daddy he'll come, you'll see."

But Frederick Hawkins had another code of morals. " I'd disobey my parents if I had any to speak on. If I'd a dozen on 'em, I'd disobey the bilin'." Mrs. Groves pointed out that by doing this Frederick would be brought into collision with his Creator, and dwelt on the impolicy of such an action. But he continued obdurate.

" I'd disobey the kit on 'em. You'd see, if you kep' your eye open." Then, addressing Lizarann, he added : " You give me a chestnut, and I'll disobey your parents for yer. You jist try ! See if I don't !" Then, when Lizarann timidly produced the chestnut, in great doubt of whether her action was justifiable, he added : " See if I ain't back again afore yer know where y' are," and, after a slight preliminary quick-step or double-shuffle, fled away into the growing dusk.

" You keep your sperrits up, child," said Mother Groves. And, as is usual when one hears that one's spirits want keeping up, Lizarann's went down. But she felt the old lady's goodwill, and went and stood close up to her, taking care to choose the side away from the roasting-box, lest she should seem simply seeking warmth. However, she was soon invited round to the other side. The warmth made her communicative.

" My daddy he's been to sea," she said. " Only in real ships, and come home again. The Flying Dutchman she never come home." This did not explain itself to Mrs. Groves. She drew a false inference.

" She went to the bottom, I lay. And all aboard of her belike. Lord be good to us !"

Lizarann shook her head. " Not the Dutchman. She's afloat, every spar on her,"—she religiously gave Jim's exact words, with a sense of saying a lesson—" and to



stop afloat till the Lord comes to judge sinners from repentance." She got a little confused here, but it sounded good, and her hearer was impressed.

"Now only 'ark at that!" said she. "I'd 'a said you was a God-fearin' child. And you may never need doubt but it's all true, my dear!" Mrs. Groves, perhaps, was prepared to ascribe truth to any narrative that had a religious phrase or two in it; still, she was probably impressed with the little person's manner, for she referred to Frederick Hawkins, in contrast. "Now, that young Turk, he's no respect, and won't come to no good end, I lay."

But Lizarann didn't want the conversation coaxed away from the Flying Dutchman. "Daddy *seen* her, himself," she said fervently; and then, resuming the lesson-manner: "Every stitch o' sail on her set in a three-quarter gale freshenin' from the south. And the look-out forward, he seen her too. And Job Collins, he seen her. And Marmaduke Flyn, he seen her. And Peter Cortright, he seen her." All these were essential items of the often-told tale.

Mother Groves's hearing was none of the best; so when she condemned the time-honoured legend as outlandish and French, it may be she had really supposed that some of the expressions were in a foreign tongue, any variety of which she would naturally consider French, failing instruction to the contrary. But Lizarann's reference to the Lord, to sinners, and to repentance, was strong enough in itself to keep suspicions of Voltaire and Tom Paine in abeyance. Mrs. Groves therefore allowed the story to continue, and felt fortified against the heresies abounding on the Continent by the approved religious bias of the narrator.

"Peter Cortright and Marmaduke Flyn they was both on the mainyard reefin', alongside o' my daddy, and Job Collins he was aft by the binnacle. Then Peter Cortright he sings out to my daddy to look; and my daddy he looked and seen her, carryin' all sail afore the wind. And then, no more time than what you says budget in, she was agone away, out o' sight." A pause came here, for dramatic impressiveness. Then followed, for reinforcement of testimony: "But Job Collins, he seen her, too, plain!"

Mrs. Groves only said, "My sakes, now!—to think of

that." But rather as a courtesy to the narrator. She would no doubt have followed her meaning better if thawed indoors before a nice warm fire. She certainly could not, or did not, admit to her mind a comparison that surely hung on the outskirts of the tale—a parallel between that moment on the great sea, and *now*! To think of it all! Of the three reefers out on the yard, struggling with the mighty wind; of the rising seas whose crested foam it blew to spray; of its voice as it whistled through the drenched cordage, and made a whisper of the sailor's shout to his mate, that spoke of the ship he saw out yonder—the ship that, whatever she really was, was to become the Flying Dutchman in the memories of all the three! And then to think of what that child—that almost baby girl—told about her as she nestled, welcome enough, to the side of the old soul that had spent her last decade selling, in the London Streets, the chestnuts that had ripened in the southern sun, above the slopes the vines grew on. To think of the sordid and darkened lives, closed round in the intolerable hive of their own contriving, so stunted and suborned to a spurious contentment as never to long for an escape; so strange to the meaning of the word "rejoicing" as to find a version of it in the filth-house at the corner; whose swing-door, to say the truth, the little maid looks rather enviously at as it opens and closes, letting out the vapid bawlings from the human fools within into the silence of the streets, and suggesting jolly bad ale and new to the cold and empty passer-by! To think of the millions near at hand, all sunless beneath the great black pall that has for weeks past shrouded their visible world, but has left them unchoked as yet and confident, and even a little boastful—Heaven knows why!—of some strange indefinite advantages carbon and sulphur confer on those who can breathe them and live.

No two items of the parallels could be more unlike, surely, than the reefers out on the yard in the great sea wind, and such chance wayfarers as are to be seen now—few enough, for all who can keep indoors prefer to do so—making the best of their slippery way home, let us hope, to the native joint and vegetables and rice-pudding. Certainly—so one would have said—none more unlike than those of this



approaching crowd, close on the heels of three policemen in charge of a wheeled ambulance, hand-driven, working slowly along the least slippery part of the road. And most unlike of all, surely, the human burden, sot or reprobate perhaps, that the closed curtain of the ambulance hides from us. But he would have been wrong who said so. For it was Jim himself that was inside that ambulance, and he ought by rights to have come along that road on his feet.

"You lie still, my good feller. The doctor he'll see to you." The policeman who says this to the interior of the ambulance says it as one to whom any form of poll-parrotting—that is to say, human speech—is distasteful. He slaps his gloves for warmth, as he walks beside the ambulance. He is a reserve man, who has come out in charge of it. But a moment after he listens again; there may be exceptions, after all, to a rule of universal glum silence! What is this ambulance case saying?

"It ain't for myself, master. It's for my little lass. She comes for to fetch me home to the Green Man . . . house at the corner . . . very nigh to us now, as I take it. . . ." Jim's voice is bad, and he is speaking against pain, gallantly. A subordinate constable says, "That's so, too!" and this confirmation reinforces Jim, who goes on, recognising the voice: "Your mate, he knows her. You'll tell her, master. I'll trust ye for a good man . . . there's only a little bit of harm done . . . say I've had worse happen many a time afore. . . ." But Jim is at the end of his tether. His voice goes faint. His instruction was clear, though.

"See for the child, Clancy," says the first officer. "And tell 'em at the bar to send out a small brandy." Clancy goes on ahead. He is a person incapable of feeling surprise, so when he meets a potboy approaching with a glass of brandy, he makes no useless inquiries, but merely points backwards over his shoulder towards the approaching ambulance.

The potboy carries the brandy on, and the officer gets it down Jim's throat somehow. "Very smart of you, Thomas," says he, inventing a name for the potboy, a complete stranger to him. "Nothin' like being beforehand!"

But Thomas disclaims any credit for himself. His action

was, he affirms, due to instructions transmitted to him by a young customer. His report is: "He cuts in and he says, says he, p'leece accident, he says. Pickford's waggon gone over a bloke, he says. You cut along out with a nip o' brandy for a stimilant, he says. That's what the orficer says, he says. And off he goes!" As the brandy is consumed, it clearly will be a good contribution to taciturnity to say nothing about it. Moreover, the potboy, miscalled Thomas, conveys that his governor, at the Man, is not a blooming screw; and that the brandy ain't worth going to law about. The officer suggests, however, that a second nip would not be unwelcome to himself, and would bring the total up to the point of being chargeable to the Force.

There is time for all this, as a case of this sort must be carried gently, apart from the fact that the slippery road makes caution necessary. And by the time the ambulance reaches the corner Lizarann is sticking to loyally, mindful to the last of her promise never to go beyond where it was wrote up "Old Vatted Rum," her first tendency to break into panic-stricken sobs, on hearing that her daddy has had an accident, is already well under control; the policeman Clancy, whom she knows by sight, and has even spoken with, and who therefore is trustworthy, having told her that her daddy will soon come round, and never be a penny the worse.

"Now *you're* going to be a good little girl, ain't you, and not make a shine?" Thus the policeman, on vernacular lines, supposed to be soothing to the excitable. And Mother Groves, partly in deference to a uniform, adds: "You do like the gentleman tells you, my dear, and go along where he says!" This suggests to Clancy, who had at first intended to limit himself to negative injunctions, to say: "Yes, you run along home, little miss, and tell 'em your daddy's being took proper care of."

But the terrified scrap, blue with the cold, half-choked with the hysterical gasps she is fighting against so bravely, as bidden, sees a deadlier possibility still before her in her arrival at home without her daddy. It was the dread of having to tell, more than the fear of being accounted the responsible culprit, that kept her glued to the spot. She



was docility itself towards constituted authorities of all sorts, but now her feet simply would not move. Oh, what a huge relief it was when the other policeman, him along of the hospital-barrer, said : “ Ketch that kid, some of you, and bring her along this way ! Can’t wait here all day ! ” He slammed his hands one across the other very hard, not only to procure circulation, but to express promptitude.

The kid didn’t want any bringing. She was across the road and beside the ambulance before the instruction to catch her could be obeyed. “ You’ll do your daddy more harm than good, that way ! ” said the hand-slapper, stopping short. Lizarann’s first instinct, to scramble up the hospital-barrer—to get at her daddy on any terms—had to be combated on his behalf. “ Peck the child up, and ’old her acrost the edge,” suggests the potboy from “ The Man.” The constable remarks, “ Some o’ the public ’ll be feeling dry by now, and nobody to serve ’em ! You best carry that empty glass back, Thomas.” But he accepts Thomas’s suggestion, and Lizarann is grateful to the strong hands that pick her up to kiss her daddy’s face. Was it really his ?—she thinks to herself, as they put her down again out of her father’s sight, below the couch-rim of the ambulance. She can’t speak ; he can.

“ Ye never cried ‘ *Pi-lot*,’ little lass.” How hard he tried to make his voice cheerful, and how well he succeeded, too !—mere mass of breathless pain that he was. The least word a man can speak over whom a waggon has passed, crushing both legs, will show the constitution of a giant behind it, even if it is followed perforce by a groan ; and Jim suppressed even that. Were not those his little lass’s lips that had just touched his cheek ? She, poor child, could only say “ Daddy ! ” or mix it with a sob. Which of the two Jim heard, who can say ? But just at that moment the nip of brandy began to tell, and Jim was able to make a great effort. “ Never you fret, little lass,” he said. “ The ship’s doctor, he’ll make a square job of my leg. You run away home and say I’m took proper care of.” What Lizarann’s daddy said was to be done was the thing to do, past doubt, and nothing else could be right. Lizarann started straight for home.

Poor Jim!—he knew what he was and where he was well enough. But he couldn't find his words right. So he talked of the ship's doctor, knowing all the while that the surgeon of the Z division was going to attend to his leg. As to the extent of his hurt and how it came about, he knew almost as little as the story does, so far. All he was sure of was that he lost his bearings after leaving his precious board at the barber's shop, was shouted at to stand clear, didn't stand clear, and was overwhelmed by what he should have stood clear of, and knocked silly. Beyond that, the little that had reached him, since he recovered consciousness, related so much to the prophetic certainty of its speakers that what had happened had been sure to happen, and they could have foreseen it any day, that it made him little the wiser. And what the crash had left of his faculties was too actively employed about his child to feel curious about the details of the accident.

Lizarann's first information about it, as she completed the legend of the Flying Dutchman to Mother Groves, was from the boy Hawkins, who came running to report the disaster, just as she was standing cross-examination on her first deposition. Instead of coming straight, he just in at one door of the ale 'us, and out at the other, like you might have said, only half a minute between! He then come crassin' over—this was Mrs. Groves's experience—and queer he looked, causing Lizarann to ask, "Ain't my daddy there?" in alarm. To which his reply was alarming and ambiguous: "Oh ah!—he's *there* all right enough—wot there is of him." He did not improve this by beginning, in a throat-clearing, gasping way, like a boy whose speech has lost its orientation, "I say, Missis..." Whereat Lizarann, in growing terror, broke into hysterical sobs, and would have started in her despair along the forbidden way, if the sad procession with the ambulance had not appeared, and chilled her to the marrow. She could hear the boy, greatly relieved by the appearance of direct evidence of what had happened, saying that there was nothing to make a hollerin' about; it was only a haccident, and wot could you expect, a day like this? His anxiety to minimise the evil did credit to a human heart that seemed, in spite



of appearances to the contrary, to underlie his Asiatic nature. He was even attempting further exhortation towards fortitude when the policeman came up, and he vanished.

In a very few minutes all were gone but Mother Groves and the chestnut stove, in the yellow gloom of the growing fog, waiting for the grandson of the former to come and see to the gettin' of 'em both home. As the old woman looked back on the event, it presented itself to her as an accident, and the accident had been took to the Hospital. That was all. On'y, that poor little thing! But Mrs. Groves soon forgot her, and was back on a great problem of her life—would the stove last out her time, with a bit of patching now and again? It had been that patched already, and was near falling to pieces. And when her grandson come, late, she'd a'most forgotten the accident. There now, she declared if she hadn't!

Lizarann pattered on as hard as she could go, so many steps to a sob, until she got to Dartley Street, and then she heard, behind her, the boy Frederick Hawkins, out of breath. "You ain't any call for to watercart, young un," said he. His manner was superior and offensive, but Lizarann felt that benevolent intention combined in it with masculine dignity. Still, protest was called for.

"I hin't a-cryin'!" she said. "On'y my d-daddy—he's t-took to the Hospital!" It was too dreadful, put into words, and Lizarann broke down over it.

"Who do yer call the worse by that? *He ain't, not he!*" This boy means well. His better nature is roused, but he has no mode of speech that is not truculent or threatening. He softens a little, though, as he becomes communicative: "Why, I had two uncles and a aunt, flat they was, under a street-roller! And they just off with 'em to the Horspital, and, my eyes and witals!—you should a' seen 'em no better than a fortnit after! Singin' they was!"

Lizarann disbelieved this story, but not because of the main incident. It was the singing that stuck in the gizzard of her credulity. Uncles and aunts never sang. They might be raised from the dead; may not Lazarus have had

a niece ? But *singing* !—no ! She merely summarised her views, not arguing the point : “ They never sang nuffint.”

A proud spirit brooks no contradiction. “ Ain’t I tellin’ of yer ?” said the Turk indignantly. He adduced corroborative evidence. “ Why !—warn’t a boy-makes-his-livin’-by-daily-journals-I-knows’s father’s corpse h’isted up out of a shore and took to the Horspital stone-dead with the un’olesome atmosphere and fetched to ? And dined off of nourishin’ food the same evening, and rezoomed work on the Monday ?” Meeting no expression of doubt of this case, he adduced another, more calmly. “ Likewise Tom Scott, as ’arf killed Parker for five pound aside, he picked up six of his teeth he’d knocked out, he did ; and he run after him to the Horspital, he did ; and they stuck ’em in again for Mr. Parker, they did, as good as new. They can do most *anythin’*.” So it appeared. And the cases gained greatly in credibility by the Turk’s obviously true recitation of maturer ideas than his own in the language of seniors. It was like Lizarann’s own tale of the Flying Dutchman ; and she felt it so, and found solace accordingly. She hoped the Turk would go all the way with her, to give moral support, and repeat his experience. You see, this Turk was, to her vision, big, authoritative, and mature. He did not present himself to her as an impident young sprat, in want of local smacking. Which no doubt would have been Mrs. Steptoe’s view of him had he come all the way. But he forsook Lizarann at the top of Tallack Street, leaving her grateful to him, all the more for his narration of how he heard the blooming copper say a nip o’ brandy wouldn’t be amiss as a stimilant, and he told ’em at the Green Man. He added that he expected to be proarsecuted for telling of ’em—recalling a little the saying of the third Napoleon, that the Human Race always crucifies its Messiahs.

So there stands Lizarann trembling on the doorstep, after jumping up to the knocker to strike it back and leave it to execute a single knock by itself, and watching the great white flakes of snow that are beginning to fall at their leisure—no hurry—plenty of time yet for three inches deep of them and their mates before the milk comes in the morning !



## CHAPTER XII

LIZARANN could not shut her eyes to the difference between Aunt Stingy, as she anticipated her on the doorstep, and the Police Force, according to her last impression of it. Her aunt's was not a bosom she could fly to for solace in her trouble—well ! no more was that of the Force, if you insist on literalness up to the hilt ; but metaphorically she would far sooner have had recourse to the latter than the former. She did not, however, expect penalties this time if she could get in her explanation ; but she had doubts whether the shortness of her aunt's temper would allow of its development at sufficient length to be understood.

She tried to think of some quick thing to say that would at once reveal her daddy's mishap and the cause of her return without him. But she should have done it before that sepulchral single knock had shown the executive power of the knocker, and brought out by contrast the footless, hoofless, wheelless silence of Tallack Street. Now that its summons to open had been delivered, the poor little shivering author of it could think of nothing at all. She might have done so, though, as far as time went, for she had to repeat her knock after a pause her terror made to seem short ; while to her eagerness for any human voice—even Uncle Bob's—it seemed awfully long. But, as it turned out, the best she could have thought of would have been of little use.

The second knock brought about a shuffling in the house that fluctuated a moment, threatened to subside as it had begun, then seemed to decide on action, and approached the door—but heavily, being palpably Uncle Bob, whose mission seemed to be considered complete by the household when he had stood the door on the jar, and left it, without waiting to see who had knocked. Of course, it could only have been Jim and the child. So it looked as if Mr. Steptoe had

decided that his duty was discharged by removing obstacles to their entry, and leaving them to close the door their own way. He'd stood the candle down and just left it to gutter in the passage, when Lizarann got inside of the house. There was something gone wrong there, too, evidently.

As her uncle was in the habit of using the adjectives popular in his class rather freely, Lizarann was not surprised when, supposing himself to be addressing her father, and asking him to "shet to that door and keep the cold out of the house," he prefixed one open to many objections to each of his three substantives. But she was surprised at the tone of his voice, which chattered in gusts, as though control over it went and came, and at the way he was crouching over the fire. He had spoken to her father as Jim, and evidently was taking him for granted—had grasped no facts.

"Please, where's Aunt Stingy?" The child could think of no better thing to say. Something was altogether too wrong with her uncle. She could see he was shaking. All things were all wrong clearly, and the world a nightmare!

"In her bed, mayhap!—shamming ill, I take it." Then he raised his voice, but never looked round: "Jim!—why can't you shut up that da-da-damned d-d-door and come inside?" He had a fair convulsion over those words, more like the chattering fit that sometimes comes before a bad attack of sea-sickness than the effects of ordinary cold. Many may not know this sort.

"Father ain't here," was all Lizarann could say.

"Then shet to the damned door till he comes." He could say this and never look round, or notice the sob-broken voice, all a-strain with its terrors, of the little speaker. If he had only cursed her for crying, it would have sounded sane by comparison. Lizarann wished herself back in the street, with the Turk. And how happy those few minutes seemed now, when she did not know about daddy, and was telling Mother Groves about the Flying Dutchman!

She could only stand speechless and utterly terrified at the oddity of her uncle's manner—she well knew his ordinary one, of being in the liquor he was never out of—and was just on the point of mere mad screaming or starting



to run God knows where, when the voice of Aunt Stingy came from her bedroom above, also with alarm in it. "Jim, can't you hear, you fool? Leave him to himself, I tell you. He's had the horrors." Aunt Stingy seemed to imply that the horrors, whatever they were, would subside of themselves.

Ill has a fixed point in the minds of young children—a simple maximum it reaches and never goes beyond. Lucky for them that it is so! For a step further would kill. Lizarann's mind could be dragged no farther along the road of terrors that leads maturer lives to self-slaughter or the madhouse. Or it may be some pitying angel wrapped her small soul in a merciful stupefaction, that it might live. For when her aunt's voice came again, peevish and impatient, but without sense of any very abnormal conditions, she was able to answer, "Yass, Aunt Stingy," but not very audibly.

"Why can't you answer when I speak? I tell you, let him bide. He's best to himself, and he's had all what liquor there was. . . . Can't you answer? . . . Fetchin' me down! . . ."

The child understood her aunt's context, for all its elisions. To propitiate, she ran upstairs. A descent in wrath, portended by an exaggerated foot-tramp, was averted by her words: "D-daddy ain't come b-back—he ain't!"

"Why couldn't you speak?—little hussy! You're a child to have in a house. When's he coming?"

"He *ain't* coming! Yass—he *ain't*! He's took to the doctor on a barrer. Yass—he *is*!" And Lizarann, whose small hands, cold and blue, are all tremor and visible unrest from panic, would like to run, but dares not. She has worded her awful message, though. That is something, however much Aunt Stingy may doubt its truth.

"Who's to know you ain't lying? Who's to know he ain't in at the Robin Hood? Now, if you're story-tellin' . . .!" A bony warning finger should have been enough without any further details of the penalties of falsehood. A reference to a flagellum that had once been inherent in a discarded pair of the speaker's stays—an incredible wooden lathe—ought to have been quite superfluous. But Mrs. Steptoe had had great trials, to excuse her short temper.

[ However, nothing can alter the facts ; and Lizarann can only repeat her statement. Daddy had been took away on the p'leece barrer, with curtings ; and his leg was hurt. But the doctor was at the Horspital. This was felt, and offered, as a palliative. Surely it deserved better recognition than, " And why couldn't the child tell me all this before ? Keeping me standin' here !" very wrathfully fired off at poor Lizarann. She *had* told it, and at the earliest possible moment. What could she do more ?

Aunt Stingy's reception of the story, which was less *emotionné* than Lizarann had expected, had its good side. Perhaps the presumptuous boy's description of the powers of Hospitals was not all fanciful, and her aunt's wider experience knew that in a short time daddy would be back home again ; not only well and sound, but even better and sounder. Lizarann extracted consolation from her aunt's half callous hearing of her news, without closely analysing it. Probably Mrs. Steptoe would have been more sympathetic if her own cup of bitterness, like her small niece's, had not been full to the brim already. But sympathy would have intensified Lizarann's solicitude about her father ; the fact that the news could be apathetically received by anyone, even Aunt Stingy, fortified her. It may even be that she was braced by her own keen feeling of the injustice her aunt did her in apparently ascribing her father's disaster to her, when really she was only the innocent and most unwilling bearer of the news of it. That, however, was Mrs. Steptoe's attitude. " There's a many'd 'a said you didn't deserve no supper," said she, and claimed a weak good-nature as a quality of her own. She hustled Lizarann into her father's bedroom, with needless collateral pushes in wrong directions, and the admonition, " Don't let me catch you in the parlour, or you'll know of it. Starin' round !" Her truculence, no doubt, had something of a safety-valve character, and she may have thought that the youth of its object would remain ignorant of its full stress, while she herself had the whole advantage of the relief it gave. But really the child understood more than she ascribed to her, and felt its injustice, tempered by the broad consideration that it was only Aunt Stingy.

Mere ferocity towards children is bad enough, but it is



hardest to bear when it is illogical. Aunt Stingy was inconsecutive in her grounds of indictment against Lizarann, and this added to the sting of her injustice. No child would have been readier than she to see to her own supper, and hot up half a bloater on the bit of fire that had looked so cheerful in the front room—though she couldn't above half see it for Uncle Bob gettin' in the way—or to stoast a slice of bread afore the bars with a fair allowance of butter on ; or to do what she dared not ask her aunt to do, and lie the four chestnuts, which she still treasured mechanically inside her frock, on the top bar where it was flat, to get the heat back in 'em a bit, before cracking off the shell. So it was inconsistent and absurd in her aunt, after telling her to keep where she was or she would let her know, to return presently with all the supper she would get to-night, comin' in so late, and to add : “ *I* wasn't waited on when I was a little girl. Standin' round, expectin' your elders to fetch and carry !” quite ignoring the fact that she herself had paralysed her niece's activity by instructions not to go outside of that room until she was told to it. And equally so when, without any evidence that the child was going to say a word, she added : “ Now, don't you answer me, for that I *cannot* abide ; but just you eat your supper and go to bed, or we shall have *you* ill next.” Of course, it was only when Jim was out of the way that Mrs. Steptoe allowed the shortness of her temper to get the better of her so completely, and on this occasion everything was against elasticity.

Things were all so nightmare-like that nothing could well make them worse, or Lizarann might have been additionally terrified and oppressed when her aunt, before consigning her supper finally to her for consumption, looked it all over closely and said, more to herself than the public : “ *I* don't see any things a-crawling.” As it was, in the Valley of Shadows Life was passing through to-night, Lizarann merely said : “ There ain't nuffint on the stoast,” and began her supper off it sadly. Her daddy's great effort to speak against his pain, and his reassuring words about the doctor, had made that cheerless evening meal a possibility to his little lass. Full knowledge, and a year or so more of life, would have meant inability to eat. But Lizarann was

very young, and, moreover, could not credit a possibility of mistake to her daddy. Had he not spoken confidently of the "ship's doctor" making a square job of his leg? She had certainly a slight misgiving that this pointed to his leg assuming a different shape after the operation. All sorts of contingencies hung about Hospitals. You never could tell what grown people wouldn't be at next. But whatever the outcome was, daddy would be *there*. And this black cloud would roll away.

Aunt Stingy retired, and left Lizarann to herself and her supper with a final imputation of rebelliousness and disobedience that was quite groundless—so its object thought. "You do like I tell you, and go straight to bed when you've e't your supper. Burnin' the candle-ends for nothing!" She then did violence to the understanding, by adding: "The light won't last you out, except you look sharp; and then you'll be in the dark." If a rigid economy was compulsory, how could extravagance be possible? But menace without method was Aunt Stingy's attitude to-night.

Lizarann, left alone, looked all round the tray and under the milk-jug, but could see nothing crawling. She was not so much concerned with the avoiding such things as articles of diet as a County Family would have been, or even the Upper Middle Class; her object was to throw light on her aunt's soliloquy, which she had not ventured to ask the meaning of. Getting no light, she ate the scrop o' bloater, and the stoast and butter, and drank the milk, and did very well, for her aunt was not christened Stingy from any tendency to cut down rations unduly. Only she would have done better still, had she been able to sob less, and if the resources of a pocket-handkerchief ten inches square had not required supplementing by sleeves, which can only be crudely engineered against tear-drops, or their reincarnations. But she got through her supper before ever the candle set alight to the paper, and flared. Then she got to bed before the flare became convulsive; not to be left in the dark with—who knows?—a nightgowned sleeve inside out and no finding where. Because we all feel that spectres are not to be trusted, unless you have something on. Indeed, timid persons are not happy till



the whole thickness of the bedclothes is between them and possibly convincing phenomena.

The candle died hard. But Lizarann knew that the longer it took, the less it would taint the atmosphere after its last convulsion, and left it to smoke in peace. So she watched it from her bed that stood in what was little more than a cupboard off the room her father slept in, and cried to think that his was empty. She watched, and wondered which would come first, the last flicker, or her last mouthful of chestnut. For she ate those chestnuts cold, and shoved the shells well under the bolster so Aunt Stingy shouldn't see. She was a very human little girl, was Lizarann, for all she was so devoted to her daddy.

The candle outlived the last chestnut. Then consideration had to be given to the problem how to get to sleep afore the nasty smell come along the ceiling and down. Once asleep, you can ignore smells, even when sut. Sut is the worst, but candlegutter has a nasty flavour with it. So Lizarann did wisely to go to sleep vigorously.

She was succeeding, and beginning to dream a nice dream, though she wasn't getting warm yet, when her aunt made a tempersome re-entry on the scene. Lizarann woke with a start, and, remembering all the dreadful reality, broke out crying—she couldn't help it! Shaken by one arm, and told to wake up and have done with that petering noise, she recovered self-possession, except for a lagging sob at intervals, and sat up. Directed, inconsecutively, to lie down and go to sleep again, and no more nonsense, she was preparing to comply when her aunt gave a first beginning of a screech and stopped it short.

“Whatever is it? . . . O Lard! . . .”

“It's a ch-chestnut sell. I eated it.” Confession proved good policy in this case, averting inquiry which would have revealed the hidden store under the bolster.

“O Lard, what a turn it gave me! . . . he's made me as bad as himself. . . .” The woman had a frantic look about her; her husband's horrors evidently had a sort of infection for her; though of course the child had little insight into this. “You bad child, you! You little good-for-nothing slut, lyin' in bed eating chestnuts, and your father in the Hospital!”

This wounded Lizarann to the quick, and righteous indignation overcame both grief and fear. "I *ain't*," she shouted, and for the moment quite forgot that she *was*, or at least *had been*, the moment before.

"Don't you tell me that, you ontruthful child, and your leavings staring you in the face! Now just you tell no more stories, but say where they've took your father, and what he's done to himself."

This retrospective use of a conviction for untruth—and a morally unjust one—to suggest a course of antecedent misrepresentation on her part, seemed to Lizarann quite the worst piece of mendacity within her experience. But it got the conversation still further away from that nutshell deposit; and that was good, so far. "Father *said* he'd be took proper care on, and I w-wasn't to c-cry, and I shan't!"

"*Can't* you tell me where they've took your father *to*, instead of vexin' me? Is he gone to the Station, or the Hospital?"

"The Spoleece, they carried him off to the Sospital. Yass!" Then, sitting up in bed, a small monument of woe, for the moment tearless, Lizarann considered whether she had grounds for deciding which Hospital. She knew of three, the Smallporks, Guys's, and Bartholomew's, but she was very uncertain about the two last. She decided on denying the Smallporks, if asked. However, her aunt accepted *the* Hospital as sufficient. Let it go at that!

"What did your daddy say he'd done to his leg? Now, no makin' up! Say the truth, like he told you." This would have been a signal to many children to strain hard to invent the truth out of their own heads. Goaded by stupid, unsympathetic people, they do this in self-defence. But Lizarann was honourable and clear-headed.

"He only saided his leg—didn't say nuffint about it. Only the sip's doctor would make a square job of it. Yass!"

"And what good's your schoolin' done you? Couldn't you have the sense to ask and find? What ever do you suppose God gave you your tongue for?—to set with your mouth wide open? Little plagues can talk fast enough when they ain't wanted to it!" She then suggested, most unfairly, that Lizarann was detaining her by holding



out false hopes of information. “*I should like to know how long you expect me to stand here askin’ questions. This time o’ night ! And me wanted to look after your uncle ! Get down into your bed and ha’ done with it ! I can’t waste my time talkin’ to you.*” After which she departed and locked the door ; Lizarann could not imagine why. But there was something very queer with Uncle Bob, who had been audible all the time in fitful outbreaks, conveying a sense of his adjective applied as a stigma to many things, and as a refreshing emphasis to parts of speech.

Lizarann’s last impression—a hazy one, before deep sleep came, and total oblivion—was that her aunt went out from the house, leaving the street door on the jar, and that then she heard the voice of their neighbour Mrs. Hacker, saying, “*He’ll be all right by morning.*”

Now this little maiden attached only two ideas to this husband of her aunt : one, that he was a painful concomitant of all their lives, who had to be put up with, and where was the use of complainin’ ?—the other that he was the victim of a liver-disorder known as “*the boil.*” His absorption of gin was part of himself ; a practice as much identified with him as any inherent quality or fixed condition ; perhaps the celibacy of a priesthood presents a sort of parallel case. So all new and strange developments in Uncle Bob were credited to this disorder, and when Mrs. Hacker from over the way said the patient would be all right by morning, the only suggestion to Lizarann’s drowsy mind was that there was a bottle of doctor’s stuff never been took, and that it had just come in handy. For—but perhaps you know this ?—the masses, *par excellence*, account all drugs good for all diseases, if took reg’lar. The classes, prone to affectation, get prescriptions made up each time.

So the child was soon sound asleep and happy.

But the cobbler’s disorder was the first beginning of the end of a long devotion to gin, and, to speak scientifically—always do so when you can !—he was in a very advanced condition of Alcoholism. But he was very unlike the priest, who, in the most advanced conditions of celibacy, passes his life—poor fellow !—in secret longing for the

remedy. For Mr. Steptoe hugged his Alcoholism, caressed it, and fed it constantly with new supplies of raw gin. His affection for the cause of his disease was self-supporting, and he longed for small goes of it as keenly as the priest longs for the proper antidotes of his—for Home and Love.

When Aunt Stingy took such pains to lock her niece into the bedroom she might just as well have locked her husband into the front parlour. But she was deceived by appearances. For it was just—only just—untrue that he had had all the liquor there was. There was a short half-glass in the bottom of an unnoticed bottle, put by to be took back, and a penny on it. On this Steptoe greedily pounced, during his wife's first interview with the child in the next room. It produced that momentary flash that is so misleading in these cases, when actual improvement seems to follow a new stimulus. Often the trembling hand and idiot brain resume skill and coherency, for the moment, only to fall still lower at the next reaction. The woman felt secure in her husband's assurance that he was a blooming sight better, and that he couldn't tell what the described Hell had been the described matter with him. He promised to come to bed as soon as the fire giv' out; and she left him, free from the horrors for the time being, standing with his back agin' the mantelshelf, collecting the last heat with a view to sitting on it—the heat, not the mantelshelf—while he finished through his pipe.

She ought not to have done it. Or she ought to have took the key out of the outside of the bedroom door, or hid it anywheres handy—where *he* would never have looked for it, Law bless you! Instead, she went to bed herself, and probably fell asleep as soon as a sense of her husband moving, downstairs, seemed to warrant a belief that he was going to keep his word. She slept sound, and it may have been two hours past midnight when she was waked by a movement below, and found that her husband had never come to bed; was still smoking, probably. But this was not her first thought as, having lighted her candle, she sat up in bed, noting the sounds that followed. Her spoken reflection was: "If that's Lizarann prancing about, I'll let her know to-morrow." Then she remembered the key, and couldn't understand the position. And then took



advantage of a silence to decide that it wasn't anything. When an "anything" may involve our having to get out of bed in the cold, we are apt to decide on its non-existence. She blew out the candle and lay down again.

This is not a medical work, and it is no part of its business to locate exactly the case of Robert Steptoe in medical records. The discrimination of the symptoms of *delirium tremens* proper, and their points of difference from those of ordinary delirium—nervous or feverish—are matters of great interest, especially in their relation to treatment, but they belong elsewhere. Our function is limited to recording the symptoms of the case as they have been brought to our knowledge; and we must hope that our medical readers will allow a certain latitude to the description of the only instance of the malady that has come within its writer's experience. Some of it is necessarily conjectural, but nothing would be gained by a laborious effort to separate these portions from the certainties. For instance, the patient's hours in the room alone, after his wife left him, must be matter of surmise. But surmise to the following effect appears well grounded.

So long as the effect continued of the small dose of stimulant he had discovered, he remained sane and free from immediate delusion, and had no other intentions than to smoke through his pipe and follow his wife to bed, as promised. But after he had finished it, and knocked the ashes out—they were found on the hob, and the pipe stuck in the looking-glass frame, when the ground was gone over afterwards—his attention was arrested by something crawling over the table. He had seen one before (as appears by our narrative), in fact, he had seen several, causing a sympathetic horror in Aunt Stingy. He tried to destroy this one, but nothing came of the attempt. Putting a volume on it and crushing it down only caused it to come through the book and crawl over it. He tried this frequently, wondering at the result, but not specially alarmed—more amused perhaps in a kind of vacuous way—until he saw another, and then another. The place was all over them, and he called them names—some very inappropriate—and qualified them all with his favourite

adjective. In themselves they really did not matter. But most unfortunately the fact that they were all going in the same direction showed him that they were emanations from a man of the name of Preedy, a leather-seller, of whom he used to purchase ready-closed uppers and cuttings. It was shrewd of him, he thought, to identify Preedy as their original source by the steady way in which they all kept going in one direction. And still shrewder to infer that it was all part of a scheme to oust him from the sort of little kennel or box in which he carried on his trade in a street half a mile off. It was left locked at night ; but, seen by the light of these vermin, and a buzzing noise that accompanied them, what was to prevent Preedy getting possession of it and bribing the police on duty to support him in his usurpation ? He sat down for a minute or two longer to think this out. The room was always well lighted, because the street gas-lamp, just outside, always showed through the clear space above the shutter.

Reflection did not even suggest that it might be a mistake about Mr. Preedy. If it had, his condition would not have been delirious. On the contrary, it all became clearer to him than ever. If it were not true, how came he to have read half-an-hour since full particulars of it under the heading "Late Entries" in the sporting journal that was still lying on the table ? He could find it again in a minute, only it was so dark. He had a match and lit it, to read by ; but his hand shook so—always along of that (described) Preedy—that he couldn't master the (described) small type. And his wife had got the candle away. Just like her !—she done it a-purpose. But he knew there was a candle in Jim's bedroom, next door.

The noise he made fumbling at the door, which was of course locked, waked Lizarann, who, having fallen asleep on the fact that her aunt had locked her in, knew that fact and no other as her senses returned. She called drowsily, "You locked the key that side," conceiving the disturber to be her aunt. Contrary to what might have been expected, her uncle understood clearly, and opened the door. But the reason he felt no surprise at the key having been turned outside was one of the indescribables of delirium. It was, somehow, because Lizarann answered



instead of Jim. Of course—so it seemed to him—if Jim had answered, it would have been inside. You think that too strange? Try delirium, and see!

His wife had had nothing to gain by telling him of Jim's accident, and his faculties had not been at observation-point. Or, perhaps, he might be said to have forgotten that he had never known that Jim didn't come in to supper. Anyway, he accepted Jim as having gone to bed, and made a sort of apology for disturbing him.

"Ashkpardon mashcandlestick," said he, in two husky words, consisting of matter thrown loosely together, and added, as a single thought that might help, "Looshfer-mash." He had no idea about time—thought his wife had left him a few minutes since.

Lizarann was not frightened. She did not understand that Uncle Bob imagined her daddy was in his bed as usual; and there was nothing unusual in his coming to look for a lucifer-match. She called out to him without moving: "On the mankle-shelf, Uncle Bob." But she was only half awake. She dimly heard him feeling about the room for the candlestick, and muttering to himself. Sporadic examples of his favourite adjective made outcrops in his monologue, becoming more and more frequent as he failed to discover the object of his search. Still, Lizarann thought herself at liberty to remain half-asleep, if she chose.

Not being sure how far she had done so—she might, indeed, have been wholly asleep without knowing it—she could not have said how long this continued. She was roused in the end by the delirious man suddenly exclaiming, in a voice of terror that filled her, too, with terror: "My Goard, then, he *has* only one!" He then broke out in incoherent fear: "You keep him off of me, master—you keep him off. Or I tell yer, I'll blind him—I *will*!" At which Lizarann's heart stopped. Not from anything in the words, which were of the sort that she would have told Bridgetticks were "only Uncle Bob." Uncle Bob occurred too frequently in daily life for her to fret much about his language. The cold shiver had run down her back, this time, because she knew there was no one in the room with him. But, may she not have known falsely? Surely

there was someone else there, that he was speaking to. Listen !

“ Good job you come in, master ! You’re a good chap, you are. You’re Bonyparty, I take it, in the picter-book. You larn him to keep his distance, and I’m your friend. Won’t you take nothing ? Just a drain ? . . . ” He wandered on, with a thickness of speech that, if spelt ever so successfully, would only encumber the text.

Uncle Bob had gone mad, clearly, and would get himself took to the Asylum, where Bridgetticks’s Aunt Tabither was. Bridget was very proud of this aunt. And though there might, as in her case, be advantages in the end, the present had to be faced. And poor Lizarann was the only soul that knew anything about it, and was stiff with terror in bed, in the dark, with a speechless tongue, but a calm interior spot somewhere, that was wondering when she would begin to cry out in her agony of fear, yet knew that daddy wasn’t there to cry to.

In a few moments she was aware that the breath of the delirious man was catching again, as in terror, and his voice followed : “ He ain’t gone—he ain’t gone ! Don’t you pay no attention to ’em, master ! I can see his eye under the bed, spinning round like a wheel. If there’d a been two of ’em now. . . . ” Then in a sudden extremity of terror his voice was worse than if it had been a scream ; he forced it from his lungs in a strained whisper. “ My Goard !—he’s a-coming. He’s a-coming on. He’ll get me afore he’s done, he will. . . . Leave hold of me ! Leave hold, you . . . ” We have to stop short.

Lizarann’s impression was that he then struck out to protect himself against his imaginary aggressor. He certainly fell, and was stunned. The child grasped this, and the fact that he was now harmless for the moment. But she was so dumbstricken that it was perhaps the whole of three or four minutes before she could find her voice, and then only for inarticulate hysterical screams.

The fall of Steptoe on the floor was the sound that waked his wife in the room above. The silence that followed was almost long enough to convince her of the safety of going to sleep again. But Lizarann’s cries of heartfelt terror and entire panic came to stop that. The woman jumped up



and lit her candle, whose wick had smouldered to the grease the last time it was blown out ; it had to be coaxed, and a libation of melted paraffin had to be poured off it before it would flare up steady-like, so you could carry it and not spill. It taxed Mrs. Steptoe's nerves to negotiate all this, with that tryin' child making that noise downstairs. But it was either that or go down in the dark. We borrow her own phraseology. Besides, Lizarann had had nightmare and woke everybody, that time Jim gave Bob such a remindin', three months ago. So her aunt made her light secure before going below.

Her expectation was to find her husband in a stupid drunken sleep in the front parlour, and the door of the back room closed as she had left it. She saw the open door and quickened her pace.

"What's that child been after outside of the room ? I'll soon know about that. . . ." She soon knew all that could be known at the moment—that her husband, whom she nearly tumbled over, was insensible on the ground—or half-insensible, muttering—and that Lizarann was vociferous with terror in bed, and quite incapable, so far, of telling anything. Her first instinct was fault-finding, as against the child for screaming. "*Stop your noise or I'll make you . . . Lizarann ! . . . do you hear ? . . . Will you stop ?*" And then in a voice of vengeful resolution : "*I'll be in after you directly.*" Whereupon Lizarann choked her screams back and waited.

Her aunt was examining Uncle Bob for bruises, so she thought ; and he appeared to be resenting the inquiry. Suddenly he recovered his articulation in a wonderful way, and became quite unreasonably angry.

"You'll keep your hands off me, or I'll smack your chops for you." He gathered himself up and got on his legs, but swayed a little as he stood. "What's that you're a-sayin' ? Why the (described) Hell can't you speak up ? *Your tongue's fast enough when nobody's asked you for it. Look you here, Pry-scilla Coupland, I ain't going to be minced about no more, for nobody.*" Lizarann knew from his calling his wife by her maiden name that her uncle's state was a dangerous one. He did it whenever he became savage with drink. What followed was no

improvement. "Ah!—you may go and tell Jim if you like. He's in it, like the rest of 'em. I know all about their planning and scheming. I'll make my affidavit afore a lawyer. First thing to-morrow morning, and make an end of it all. I *will*!" His manner had such serious conviction in it that the child thought him sane for a moment. It was something grown-up that she didn't know about. Her aunt's reply, with an uneasy half-laugh in it, was an attempt to soothe and conciliate. "Whatever are you fancyin', Robert?" she said nervously. "Who's planning or scheming? Just you come up to bed, and be done with your talk-talk-talk. Affidavits and lawyers! Where shall we be next?"

"Don't you think to take me in!" His reply was in manner perfectly sane and coherent—that of a shrewd man of business, who sees through a clever imposture, being himself cleverer still. "Don't you think to take me in! I wasn't born last Sunday mornin'. Now look 'ee here, Pry-scilla Coupland! Shall I tell yer something I know? Shall I tell yer a little thing I know? A little—little thing?" This was said as a question of superhuman slyness, as he pointed an intuitive finger to emphasize it and waited. Then, quite suddenly, he became ferocious. "What the Hell, do you think I don't *know*? Do *you* think I don't know that it's *you* that's in behind it all? Ah!—you and Jim. One as like as t'other. It's a bloody conspiracy, I tell yer. And I'll make yer pay for it. I'll make yer pay." Still, Lizarann was impressed that he was speaking of something real, as there is nothing *per se* insane in an idea of a conspiracy, however groundless.

But when he next spoke, she saw that he was really mad. For her aunt, perceiving that her attempt at a soothing tone had only made matters worse, tried a little intimidation. "You wouldn't kerri on like that, Robert, exceptin' you knew Jim wasn't here. But he's a-coming, and I tell it you, for you to know. So just you bear it in mind—there!"

"Jim's over there. I seen him." He pointed to the bed.

"Talking silly, you are! His bed's empty, anyhow! But he's a-coming—that I tell you, plain. Now you come along upstairs."



“Aha!—right you are, Mrs. Hess.” This was the initial of Steptoe. He went on with a sly triumphant wrinkling of his face, that mixed oddly with the tremor of eye and lip that is part of this disease. “No, he ain’t in that bed. But I can tell yer where he is—he’s under it! That’s where Jim is. I seen his eye, plain to see! . . .”

“Jim’s eye, ye silly! Come to bed, and sleep your drink off. Ye born fool! Jim’s eye!”

“Ah!—Jim’s eye. The one he opens at night. He’s under’anded and sly—sees a rare lot more than he’ll put a name to! Why, I seen it, God damn you!”—with a sudden revival of ferocity—“I *seen* it, I tell you, there under that there bed.”

Then Lizarann knew that he was mad. Of course, she knew nothing of *delirium tremens*, but she knew quite well the state often described as “mad drunk,” and that her uncle when so affected always became violent; although since that occurrence three months since, fear of Jim had been a wholesome check. Oh, if Daddy were only here!—so thought Lizarann, as she stood in the doorway with her teeth chattering, and literally sick with terror.

“I tell you I *seen* it, and I’ll tell you some more. Only just you stand still. I’m a going for to cut it out, by Goard! Only you wait till I get my \* \* \* knife. . . . It’s round the \* \* \* corner against the window. . . .” These were the last articulate words Lizarann heard, as her aunt followed their speaker into the front room. Then the voices of both in confusion—his raving, hers concealing apprehension badly under an attempt at command. This for a while; then a rapid crescendo of terror ending in a shriek, and an appeal to Heaven-knows-who to get the Police. And Lizarann—not seven yet!—had to make up her mind what to do.

## CHAPTER XIII

WHEN the Rev. Augustus Fossett, the brother of Lizarann's schoolmistress, and incumbent of St. Vulgate's Church, Clapham Rise, got hæmoptysis, his friends tried to persuade him to throw up his appointment and go away to Australia or South Africa. His brother Jack wanted him to chuck the Church, and take to some healthy employment—the young man's expressions, not ours—and took the opportunity to generalise overmuch, on the subject of the causes of death among the Clergy. He said that something he referred to merely as "it" was "all very fine, but two-thirds of them died of consumption." He was devoted to his brother, and wanted badly to get Gus clear of that filthy slum, with its horrible rows of little houses that had two or three families in them before the mortar was dry. But Gus refused to comply with his family's wishes. "I know Jack thinks," said he, "that if he could only get me into a lawyer's wig, or a sailor's trousers, I shouldn't have an apex to my right lung, practically. And moist sibilant *riles* would be things unheard of." He added that he wasn't married, and never meant to be; that the neighbourhood was healthy, if it was a little damp; and that all he wanted was change of air now and again. Taylor would come and take his duties for a week or so, and he would go to Royd, and Bessie Caldecott would nurse him up, at the Rectory.

For the Rector of Royd, whose acquaintance the story has already made, was, in his relation to the Rev. Gus, the other half of one of those friendships that, according to Tennyson, have mastered time. So every now and again, as occasion arose, the Rev. Athelstan's broad chest and shoulders loomed large in the pulpit of St. Vulgate's, and his voice sounded altogether too big for the architectural treatment of the east window.



About six weeks before the story-time of last chapter, the reverend gentleman had said to his sister-in-law : “ Bess, I can’t have Gus kill himself this winter. He’ll do it in the end, but let’s keep him here as long as we can. I’ll go and see to his parishioners in January, and he must come here. You mustn’t let him work hard, and give him no end of cream and new-laid new-laid eggs. I can get Tom Cowper to do his work in February, and then I’ll come back and take him for walks. Ah dear ! ” The Rector’s anxiety about his friend got to the surface, through his tone of serene confidence, which was factitious.

“ What are we to do about Phœbe and Joan ? ” said Miss Caldecott.

“ Isn’t it very likely all nonsense about infection ? ”

“ I don’t know. ” Then both looked perplexed ; and that, as we all know, doesn’t do any good.

“ There’s plenty of places for them to go to . . . ” said the Rector ; but didn’t say where.

“ But they’ll be so heart-broken, ” said Miss Caldecott, “ if they are away when their uncle’s here. ” For Mr. Fossett had always held rank as a “ putative ” uncle to Phœbe and Joan, with natural confusion in their minds as a result.

“ We must think it out somehow, ” said the Rector. “ Their *potatoe* uncle ! Ah dear ! ”

It must have been thought out somehow, without danger of infection to Phœbe and Joan ; for January saw Augustus shepherding the flock of Athelstan, and Athelstan heavily afflicted with the population of a suburban slum. “ At least, ” said he to himself, in the small hours of the morning, as he plodded back to his temporary residence from a death-bed side, through a thick snowstorm—“ at least in the country we are still Shakespearian. These Londoners get more unintelligible every year. ” For a youth whom he had heard communing with another had first said, “ I’ll have your hat, Maria, ” which seemed to have no meaning ; and then when the other said, “ What price ’Igh ’Olborn, Joe ? ” had merely replied, “ So long, ” and trotted away whistling.

They were the last defilers of the English language, though, that he heard speech of for the best part of a two-mile walk. For all that had a bed to go to had done so

an hour or more since, and left the white world to the snowflakes and the police-force—the latter sadly outnumbered by the former, and fairly driven to whatever shelters official obligation allowed. For the flakes, which at midnight had been large and rather benevolent than otherwise, with a disposition to lie down quietly and not fuss, had become small and vicious and revengeful, and were rushing point-blank along the streets seeking for the eyes of passers-by and finding none. The gas-lamps, which had at first enjoyed melting them as they came down, were giving up the attempt in despair, and had each its incubus of thickening snow to darken it. The Rev. Athelstan found it pleasant and stimulating—it reminded him of the Alps, years ago—and he had only met three vehicles, all told, in the whole of his walk, so far. One was a belated coster's cart, drift-blocked; whose donkey, its owner, and a policeman were trying to help it out of its difficulties. He lent a hand, and the rest of his physical resources, most effectually, and earned benedictions and a certificate that he was the right sort. Both the policeman and the costermonger spoke as though several sorts had been tried, and been found wanting. The former, as he wished him good-night, remarked that it was a blizzard this time, and no mistake, as though serious mistakes had been made in the classification of previous examples submitted. A sense of pass-exams. hung in the air. The Rev. Athelstan said good-night, and tramped or waded off through the snow, acknowledging to himself that he didn't know why a blizzard was a blizzard. Now his impression had been that this one was a bad snowstorm. However, a policeman would know, of course.

“American, I suppose,” said he to himself, “and well up to date! Now I wonder...” He stopped opposite a wayside inn standing back from the road; a record of the days of an old suburban highway, with a drinking-trough for horses and a troughlet for dogs, and a swinging sign, half obscured by snowblotch that might fall off, or not. But it would in a minute, if waited for, for its framing creaked in the wind. “I wonder where I am?” he continued. “I've seen this pothouse before. I've photographed it, if it's the same. It was the Robin Hood.” A



snow-slip occurred at this moment, and left the outlaw's face and a portion of the merry greenwood visible. Oh dear yes!—the Robin Hood. No mistake about that, anyhow! The pause ended in complete enlightenment. "Then I know where I am. There's the new Cazenove slum on the left. Now I've got to take care not to go down the wrong turning. One's a *cul-de-sac*; ends in a fence. But I fancy mine's the next—yes!—mine's the next. Addy Fossett's school's just a bit farther on. Lady Arkroyd said it wasn't a slum! A slum made up of whited sepulchres—well! suppose we say machine-pointed brick sepulchres, and let 'em go at that." The difficulty of walking through the snow, and the silence, both seemed to favour soliloquy. He plodded on, driving aside the dry white snowdrift with his feet, and cogitating.

How deadly dark and silent it is down this side-street! Only one gas-lamp alight that one can see, some way on. And the silence! One might be murdered here so quietly, with so little inconvenience to one's murderer. And the cold! "Thank God it is me and not Gus," says the man in the snow through whose mind these thoughts pass. "He wouldn't be kept at home, even by a blizzard. Really—if I hadn't a good pair of eyes . . . Hullo! what's that?" He quickens his pace towards something he has seen or heard.

An instant after, and the silence has vanished. Piercing shrieks are on the night—a child's shrieks—shrieks of frenzied and intolerable panic, there, where nothing can be distinguished yet. . . . Yes!—*there*—coming this way through the snow—this side of the dim lamp-gleam the snowdrift all but hides . . . but oh, so small! How can a thing so small give such a cry?

How can it struggle so, either, as it is caught and picked up by a pair of strong arms, and wrapped in the bosom of a big overcoat? "Anything"—said the Rev. Athelstan, when he told the tale after—"anything to get the poor little barefooted, nightgowned scrap up off the snow and out of the cold! The *pluck* of the midget! I never saw such a baby. Not seven yet—just think of it!" For he often told of this adventure of his afterwards. But let us tell it now.

“ Oh, pleathe—pleathe—let me down ! ” It is such a heart-harrowing cry for liberty that its hearer almost believes himself cruel to shut his ears to it. But—the cold ! “ Oh, *pleathe* let me go to c-call for the Spoleece to c-come to Uncle Bob. . . . ”

“ *I’m* the Police, dear child, this time. You show me where Uncle Bob is, won’t you ? Hush-sh ! . . . there, dear, now ! . . . that way, is he ? That’s a good brave little girl. . . . In at this door, is it ? *That’s* right ! Now I’ll put you down.” And then Uncle Bob’s niece is on the ground, pulling with all her small force at the skirt of the big coat that has sheltered her. She doesn’t believe the gentleman’s statement that he is the Police ; or only with some important reservations. But he is on the side of the right, she is sure, and is vast and powerful. It is no use her pulling, if he does not mean to come after all. But all is well, for he has only paused to get off the big coat the snow falls in lumps from as he leaves it behind him on the floor, and is pulled along the dark narrow passage towards some mysterious male voice out of all keeping with its surroundings—a voice with something of a Hyde Park orator’s rant in it—pulled by the little nightgowned morsel that seems, now that the end is gained, and help has come, to be quite dumb with terror.

Along the narrow passage and through the door on the left. The room is lighted by a candle at its last gasp on a side-table, and the gleam through the window, above the closed shutters, of the street-lamp outside. There is light enough to see all that is going on in that room, and it is a sight to give pause to the readiest help, and unnerve the most willing hand. For any succour, in the very bringing of it, may in this case undo itself.

Against the wall, in the corner next the window, is the ashy face of a terror-stricken woman, kneeling with hands outstretched to avert violence threatened by a man who is waving some weapon before her eyes, while he talks incoherently. It is his voice that sounded like a popular orator’s, making telling points. What seemed a meaning when the words were unheard vanishes as they become audible.

“ You keep still afore I pin you to the wall. You \* \* \*



well know that what I swear to by Goard's the \* \* \* truth. Climb up and see—all I say is, climb up and see ! The \* \* \* noospaper's on my side, and d'you think they don't \* \* \* know. . . . Ah !—would you ?—steady—steady ! I'll put a strap on either side of you to keep you steady. You and Jim thought you were going to have it your own blooming way. And where d'you think he's gone. . . . He—he—he !” He laughed a sniggering laugh. “ Jim, he's gone along the railings. Now, don't you go sayin' I haven't told you, or I'll just rip you up afore the clock strikes. I can have your liver out just as soon as not. I can give a reference, by Goard ! Just you ask my wife—she can get a \* \* \* reference.” And then the Rev. Mr. Taylor saw that what he held in his hand was a pointed cobbler's knife, a deadly instrument.

The little girl, clinging to him in convulsive terror, made sufficiently prompt action almost impossible. He felt that if he could have caught the man's eye, he might have been able to control him. But as it was, any movement on his part might have meant a stab in the woman's heart. He could see she had on only a thin sort of flannel wrapper over a night-dress, and he understood that the man, in his delirium, conceived her to be some enemy, not his wife certainly. What she was of course he did not know. The lips of his mind formed the simple word “ drink ”—the evil principle whose name accounts for half the ills flesh would have been so glad never to come to the enjoyment of, but must perforce inherit.

He dared not spring upon the man to pinion him, with that hideous knife so near the woman's life-blood. But a change was to come—one caused by the woman herself. She could barely gasp, so paralysed was articulate speech ; but the few words she said, “ Catch hold upon him behind, master !” were heard and understood by the man, who instantly swung round to be ready for some unknown opponent. The Rev. Athelstan felt greatly relieved. The position was simplified : he was now face to face with a delirious maniac with a knife—a knife that seemed made for murder—that was all !

“ Thank God it isn't Gus, but me !” said a passing thought as he caught the madman's eye, just too late to unsettle,

as he might have done—so he fancied—the delivery of a thrust backed by the whole strength of the arm that sent it. It was well for him—so straight did the blow come—that the clerical hat he pulled off to stop it had a wide hard brim and a round hard crown, good for a point to slip on. The boss of a Japanese targe could not have balked it more cleverly. Had it struck the centre straight, it would have pierced through to the hand that held it. As it was, it went aslant, striking twice on the shining silk nap, but quite harmlessly.

“Give me the knife, my man. I can show you how to use it better than that.” His voice could not have been more collected if he had been reading the Communion Service, without meaning it, in the little old peaceful church at Royd. The delirious man, whose conception of his own position was probably that of a victim somehow at bay, surrounded by conspirators, was for a moment convinced that he would better it by compliance, and was indeed actually surrendering the knife, when the woman’s hysterical voice broke in, and undid everything.

“Yes—you give the gentleman up the knife, Robert! You give it him to keep for you now you ain’t yourself, for to take good care of and giv’ back. He’ll do the best by you! *You* may trust the gentleman . . . etc., etc.” The Rev. Athelstan’s mind said: “Deuce take the woman!—can’t she hold her tongue?” but of course he said nothing so secular aloud.

The lunatic—for he was little else—had all but given up the knife, but of course now changed his mind. “*You’re* answerin’ for him, I see!” he exclaimed, with so sane a voice it was hard to think him delirious. “I can see round some of yer better than you think. Yes—Muster Preedy! Ah! . . . would you . . . would you? . . .” This with an expression of intense cunning, with the knife held behind him; and a dangerous tendency to edge back towards the woman, all the while watching the Rev. Athelstan with a sly, ugly half-grin.

As he got nearer to the woman, she became unable to control herself—little wonder, perhaps!—and broke out hysterically: “Oh, God ha’ mercy!—stop him! stop him!—Oh, Lard!—oh, Christ! . . .” and so on. It was time to act,



and Athelstan Taylor knew it. Delay might be fatal. Guided by some instinct he could not explain, he shouted with sudden decision : " They're here, you fool ! Can't you hear them ? " and then, seizing on the pause in which the maniac's attention—caught also for the moment, perhaps, by railway sounds without—wandered to this mysterious " they," sprang upon him, and by great good luck pinioned his knife-hand as both rolled together on the carpetless floor. " Thank heaven it's me, not Gus ! " thought he again, as he and his antagonist pitched heavily on the ground. He could feel the great strength there was still in the miserable victim of the fiend Alcohol. Often patients with this disorder will need three or four men to hold them—indeed, sometimes develop abnormal muscular strength, even while its tremors are running riot through their whole system.

But Mr. Steptoe's strength would have been abnormally developed indeed to enable him to contend against the successful competitor in a hundred athletic contests in the old 'Varsity days. A few sharp struggles, and he lay powerless, his adversary kneeling over him, grasping his two wrists, while he cursed and muttered below, before the railway sounds, connected apparently with the stopping of an almost endless luggage-train, had subsided into mere clinks that seemed to soothe it to stillness. But the knife was still in his right hand.

" Now where's that little maid ? " Our little Lizarann had never run away, as some children might have done, but had held on bravely through the whole of the terrifying scene, full of admiration for this new Policeman—she almost thought he was really one ; and when she heard him ask for her, she found voice to reply, not very articulately. She was there, please !—blue with the cold and her teeth chattering. Aunt Stingy was g-gone away. So much the better, the new Policeman seemed to think. He continued : " Very well, my child !—now you can be useful. . . . No, don't call your aunty. We'll do without her ; she's no use. You do just as I tell you—just exactly ! " Lizarann nodded her alacrity to obey orders. " Me ?—yass ! " is her brief undertaking.

The gentleman looked round at her, still grasping the

wrists of his captive, who muttered on wildly, lost in a forest of execrations without meaning. He seemed satisfied that the child could be trusted, and determined at any rate to try a desperate expedient to get that horrible knife out of the maniac's clutch. The only other course would be to call or send for help. Send whom? This baby out in the snow again? Heaven forbid! As for the woman, *she* was no use. He could hear her hysterics somewhere outside. No!—if the child only dared do exactly as he told her, he would soon have that knife safe out of the way.

“Look here, my dear, where's the box of matches—the lucifer matches? Now don't you be frightened, but do as I tell you. You light a match!” Lizarann obeyed dutifully, though her hand shook. “Now, you know, if you blow that match out, there'll be a red spark, won't there? . . . Very well then, or *yass*, if you prefer it. Now I want you just to touch your father's hand with it . . . oh, he's your uncle, is he? . . . well!—now you'll have to light another. . . . Now you touch his hand with it—don't you be frightened.”

Lizarann followed her instructions without question. Whatever the gentleman said was right. *Her* duty was obedience. But she broke out in spasmodic terror at the result of what she had supposed to be some curious experiment; not to be understood by her, but certainly beneficial.

And Athelstan Taylor needed all his strength to retain the hand that was scorched, as his prisoner—or rather patient—gave a great plunge and a yell, as the fire touched him. But he kept his grip, though it was his left hand against the delirious man's right; and the knife, relinquished in the uncontrollable start, was left lying on the floor as he dragged him across the room away from it. He could breathe freer now that the knife was out of the way.

He inferred afterwards that the whole thing had happened very quickly; for the railway-occurrence without seemed to explain itself as a convoy of empty trucks shunting on a siding to allow an express to shriek past—an express that cared nothing for blizzards, and came with a vengeance, just as he gave his last instructions to



Lizarann, waiting a moment for that little person's terror to subside.

"That's a good little girl. Now pick up that knife and take it away. And then . . . well!—and then . . . shut the door after you and go to bed, for God's sake, and get warm . . . What? . . . no!—never mind Aunt What's-her-name? . . . don't say anything to her—only go to bed too. What did you say her name was? Aunt Stingy?" It didn't seem probable, but the little maiden evidently felt surprised at its being thought the reverse. She confirmed it with gravity, and was departing, small and bitterly cold, but intensely responsible, when the new Policeman called her back.

"Look here, poppet!—you stand the street-door wide open, and then you go to bed. Now shut the door."

Lizarann obeyed religiously, and crept away silently to bed. Only, as she passed through her daddy's room with its empty pillow, life became too hard for her to bear. But tears came to help, big ones in plenty; and Lizarann's bed was kind. It absorbed, received, engulfed, all but cancelled the small mass of affliction that cowered into it and stopped its ears and did its best to cease. In two minutes after leaving the New Policeman, Lizarann was little more than a stifled sob, at intervals, in the dark; in five, at most, had cried herself to sleep.

Mrs. Steptoe, after giving way—quite excusably, to our thinking—upstairs for ten minutes or so, began to be aware that her self-control was returning. But being hysterical as well as human, she utilised it to go on moaning and gasping intentionally, some time after she had ceased to be able to do it involuntarily. Curiosity about who had given such a sudden and effectual succour then began to get the better of mere terror, and she perceived she ought to make an effort. So she went cautiously downstairs and listened, outside the door, to the voices in the front room; her husband's, now seeming less definitely insane, more weak and drivelling; and that of the stranger, whom she found it easiest to take for granted, although unexplained. Very severe shock makes the mind travel on the line of least resistance. No!—she wouldn't knock at the door

just yet to ask if her services were wanted. That would do presently, especially as she expected stupor would soon follow her husband's outbreak, and if she showed herself now he might have a return. So after listening a few moments, sufficiently to satisfy herself that the stranger's voice showed a complete mastery of the position, Aunt Stingy retired into the bedroom adjoining, to be handy in case of anything—so she described her action afterwards—and then, having made sure that her niece was in bed in the little room and sound asleep, lay down on Jim's vacant bed for just a half-minute and closed her eyes. And would you have believed it?—or rather, it should be said, would Mrs. Hacker, to whom she told it, have believed it?—she was that dead wore out that only listening for two minutes to the voices going on steady, as you might say, set her off half unconscious-like, and in an unguarded moment sleep took her by surprise. Just the letting of her eyes close to had made *all* the difference! Kep' open, no such a thing! In this case they were not kept open, and there was such a thing. It took the form of profound sleep.

But before leaving the passage—the one known by the rather grandiose name of The Hall—Aunt Stingy first removed her rescuer's overcoat, that still lay on the ground, and hung it on a neighbouring hook. A more intelligent person would have seen that its owner might want it, for warmth, in a fireless room. She must needs then decide that the street-door had no business to be on the jar, and it was just that child's carelessness leaving it open; and closed it, noiselessly. This was fatal to a calculation of Athelstan Taylor's; for he had told Lizarann to leave the door open in the full confidence that the policeman on the beat would notice it; and that he would by this means be brought into communication with the outer world, without having to leave his dangerous charge alone in the house with that plucky baby and that weak woman!

No doubt a policeman did come down the *cul de sac* street, but even a policeman's step is inaudible on three inches of very dry snow. It is otherwise when the snow is partly thawed, especially if a second frost comes. Mr. Taylor concluded, believing that the street-door was "on the jar," that the policeman's bull's-eye would at once



detect it, and that his guard was sure to be relieved ; but the hours went by and nothing came. It is more likely, though, that the policeman passed at a moment of noise from the railway, for goods trains occurred at intervals through the night.

More than once he was all but resolved to leave the man's side and summon the woman, or go himself for medical help, whatever the risk might be. But he did not know what other knives might be within reach, and he was one of those people who always decide on the righter of two courses, however little may be the difference between them. Not the smallest risk should be run through fault of his of harm to come to that plucky infant—well !—or to the woman, for that matter. But he was obliged to admit that he felt less keen on that point.

So, though he relaxed his hold on the man as his paroxysms of violence died down—for they were intermittent—he never allowed him to go quite free, and scarcely took his eyes from him to inventory the scanty contents of the ill-furnished room he sat in. For he contrived to shift the position in a moment of the patient's quiescence, some half an hour after he found himself alone with him ; half-dragging, half-lifting him on to an untempting and unrestful sofa, whose innate horse-hair was courting investigation through slits and holes that had evaded the watchfulness of ineffectual buttons, guardians of its reticence in days gone by. One of those articles of furniture of which we know at once that the understraps have given, and will have to be seen to some day. An analogous chair was within reach ; and the New Policeman, not in love with his job, but strong in his determination to see it out, made up his mind to pass the rest of the night on it, if necessary, watching the fluctuations of his patient's delirium. Oh, how thankful he felt that all this had befallen him, not Gus ! What a pleasure to think of his consumptive friend in the best room at the Rectory ; sound asleep, said Hope, uncontradicted.

An hour or more passed. The violence of the patient had become more and more fitful, and seemed at length to be giving place to mere stupor. A little longer, and he would sleep. But suppose his heart failed and he died in his sleep.

Mr. Taylor had had an uncle who drank, and who died of collapse after just such an attack of *delirium tremens*. Yes—but how long after? Then, on the other hand, there was no evidence to show how long this man's attack had been going on. Nor was the Rev. Athelstan quite clear that the case was uncomplicated; the brain might be unsound at the best of times. He tried to remember all he had seen or heard of the disorder. His impression certainly had been that insomnia was a characteristic symptom, and invariable. Now this man seemed to be sinking into a state of coma. He would keep watch over him, at least until he seemed quite unconscious, and then he would try to get help from without. He might be able to rouse a neighbour, and so communicate with the police and send for medical assistance. What he was most anxious to do was to get the man safe out of the way, at the workhouse-infirmiry or the police-station, and to feel sure that he could leave the house safely with that child in it. He would come back next day as soon as he was at liberty, to find out more about her. It was fortunate that to-day was Tuesday, not Saturday—or rather he should have said, Wednesday, not Sunday. But one always thinks, when one has been up all night, that it is still yesterday!

Yes!—the breath of the man was coming more regularly, and his pulse felt slower and steadier. In a moment it would be safe to leave him and look for help. He withdrew his hand from the wrist it held and touched the sleeper's forehead. It was scarcely so hot as he had expected it to be. But it seemed insensitive to his touch, as there was no perceptible shrinking from it. The patient could be safely left for a moment.

He rose to his feet and stretched himself, glad of the respite. In the account of the affair that he wrote later to his substitute at Royd, he lays claim to having had no feeling at this moment but a wish for clean warm water to wash the touch of the drunkard's wrists off. He watched the motionless figure on the couch for a few moments, and the breathing satisfied him. He could be spared; for as short a time as need be, though.

He opened the door quietly and went out. But he returned to lock it; removing the key from within, but leaving



it in the lock. Then he opened the street-door and looked out. The little one had evidently misunderstood his instruction to leave it open—well! she really was almost a baby. However, that was enough to account for the non-appearance of any policeman. No police-officer ever leaves a “stood open” door uninvestigated in the small hours of the morning.

## CHAPTER XIV

How sweet and white and silent was the huge shroud of snow that lay so carefully on road and roof alike ; unbroken, in this untrodden stillness, by so much as the memory of a rut inherited from yesterday's traffic ; unmelted, even on the chimney-stacks by the expiring efforts of yesterday's fires ! How satisfied the stars that began to twinkle through the clearing veil of the snowdrift dying down, that the work of hiding London from them had been done thoroughly and well, and that they might shine on something clean at last ! For the blizzard had gone to an appointment elsewhere, and the few flakes of belated snow that were afloat had given up all thought of blinding human eyes, and only seemed to pause in their selection of a resting-place. They had an *embarras de choix*.

As the sole spectator of the stillness stood looking out into the night, and thinking Wordsworth to himself, he saw the fixed red eye of a Cyclops railway-signal through the clear air ; snow-scoured, and innocent, so far, of smoke. All that mighty heart was lying still—yes ! But that engine, idling on the line and wide awake, felt free to wander to and fro, with clanks, and finally to execute an *arpeggio* of truncated snorts downwards, and give a sudden yell, and depart behind a steam-blast from beneath its apron. Then Mr. Taylor saw distinctly, at the end of his wrong turning, the fence that stultified it as a thoroughfare.

A wall of snow was against the lower half of the door, and the whole row of houses it made one of was nearly masked by the drift-pile heaped against it ; and the snow that had caught and held against every roughness on the upright wall lay thick on every ledge and slope, and filled in every cavity. A sense of compromise was abroad in the air—an anticipated suggestion of a thaw ; not yet, you know, but in time ! Athelstan Taylor, as a neighbour's



clock struck five in a hurry, knew so well what the shovels meant to sound like in the morning while all was still dry ; and what the falls of snow would be like from uncleared roofs later on, when much would be slush.

There was not a soul in sight in the *cul-de-sac* street, which had so obviously been the wrong turning. There was consolation in that, though, for the Rev. Athelstan, for if it had been Gus and not he, Gus would have known his ground better, and passed on. But then !—what might not have happened to that poor little kid, asleep in there ? However, it was necessary now to think what was to be done. Not a soul in sight, and hardly a sound to be heard ; the very murmur of the city's traffic, that never quite dies, barely audible ! Every house more than ever like its neighbour, in its cloak of snow. Which door should he choose, to knock at ? One opposite looked the most promising, he thought. But he would put on his great-coat before crossing through the cold night air. Where was that coat, by the way ? So—back into the house to get it !

He struck a wax vesta to make the dark passage visible, and soon saw where the woman had hung it on a peg near the stairway. Should he, after all, go upstairs and rouse her ?—Well, no, on the whole ! Because he thought the woman bad for the patient, and better out of the way on that account. It did not occur to him that she was in the adjacent room, and the exploration above contributed as an obstacle to his decision. He felt readier for a colloquy with a roused next-door neighbour than for shaking a stupefied sleeper to wakefulness—one, too, whom he had very poor reliance on. Besides, his own clearest scheme was to get some safe person to take charge of the patient, while he himself went for a doctor. If he did this, the doctor would come. If he sent, perhaps no ! How could he tell ?

But after this slight delay, just as well to look in at the sleeper once more before leaving him ! The Rev. Athelstan, feeling very much like the New Policeman, opened the door cautiously. Just as well, for his charge was no longer where he had left him. He could see him in the half-light, blundering against the window-shutter, apparently without purpose, and talking to himself.

"Everything's took away, by Goard! Now if I could just lay 'ands on that there \* \* \* knife, I could slit 'em all up. All the biling; and that 'd make me even with 'em! Who's makin' any offer to stop me?" He muttered on, and there seemed no object in interrupting him. Very likely he would lie down and doze off again. A few minutes patience, anyhow!

Suddenly he stopped and turned. And then perceiving Athelstan Taylor as he stood by the half-open door watching him intently, he addressed him exactly as though he were one of a succession of applicants or customers, whom he had satisfied so far.

"Now who might you be, master? 'And over your job! I'll be answerable to see to it by to-morrow forenoon." He seemed for the moment quite composed and businesslike, then suddenly changed to shrewd suspicion. "Unless you're—unless you're—unless you're . . . No!—would you? That's not playing fair, by Goard! Come—you're a gentleman!—give a beggar his fair chance. . . ." For a sort of wily approach, as though to somehow circumvent an object of suspicion, had been promptly intercepted, and he found himself firmly held as before. Then an intolerable horror seemed to seize on him quite suddenly. "God's mercy—keep him off—keep him off! I'll never let on about him to no one. I promise. Only give me a blooming Testament. I'll swear!" He asked several times for a Testament, variously described, rather to the amusement than otherwise of his hearer, whose sense of language discriminated between words with meanings and expletives without. The drunkard's manner seemed to him to throw doubt on the validity of any affidavit made on an unstained volume.

But there was no amusement—nothing but a shudder—to be got out of the intense conviction of his delirium that there was some horror—some spectre or nightmare, God knows what!—in ambush behind the man who held him. Those who have nursed any ordinary fever-patient through the hours of low vitality in the night, know how hard it is to struggle against a sort of belief in the reality of his delusions—against the sympathetic dread, at least, that all but does duty for a real belief. In *delirium tremens* this



conviction is overwhelming, and the Rev. Athelstan almost felt it would be an easement, just once, to glance round behind him, and make sure there was no one else in the room. And this, although the drunkard's description seemed to apply to a conjurer (with the usual drawback) who had escaped from his coffin, but might be got back if we was sharp. His conviction of the reality of this person was too fervid to be ridiculous, or anything but unearthly ; even when he added, as confirmatory, that he was a Hebrew conjurer, as well as a sanguinary one. Simon Magus, perhaps ?—thought the Rev. Athelstan. And when he told his friend Gus Fossett of this after, he pretended it had made him laugh.

The sound of a child crying, surely ? Yes—the voice of the little girl, in an agony of grief or fear, in the next room ! He flung the madman from him, and passed out of the room, locking him in. “I heard him,” said he, afterwards, “begging me to keep Simon Magus off, but I couldn't stop to see to it.” He went into the back room, where Lizarann, roused by memory of her miseries from the lighter sleep of morning, was shedding bitter tears because Daddy was not there, but in the Hospital. Who does not know how the consciousness of affliction awaiting us will drag us awake, however much we may strive to remain in dreamland ? Lizarann was glad of the gentleman, though, whatever he was. And it was all the easier for her to give a short abstract of her tragedy of the night before, that her aunt had gone upstairs to dress, as a preliminary to action in connection with the front parlour, whatever it was that was going on there. For whether anyone was there with her husband—the gentleman of the night before, or a policeman, or doctor perhaps—she had yet to learn. And she was horribly cold. A favourable disposition towards lighting a bit of fire in the kitchen was all the more marked on this account.

The very small person sobbing in a very dirty nightgown in the middle of the back room could not—so Athelstan Taylor decided—go on indefinitely unwarmed on such a morning as this. He rejoiced to feel that there was still plenty of vital heat in her rudiment of a carcass, as he wrapped it in the first thing that came to hand, a stray relic

of a blanket of days gone by. He picked the little bundle, so compacted, up on his knee, and helped the subsidence of its sobs with a word or two of consolation. While doing so, he could hear what difficulties his case next door was getting into with Simon Magus.

"Berbecause derdaddy's in the Sussospital and hurted his leg," said Lizarann, as far as our spelling will carry us, in reply to inquiry.

"That's a good little woman! Now she'll tell me all about it. How did Daddy hurt his leg?"

Lizarann settled down to her narrative. Here was human sympathy, at last, for her real trouble. For all the dreadful scene of last night was only Uncle Bob; and of course that sort of thing was always happening, more or less, with uncles. Not daddies, look you!—that was quite another pair of shoes.

"There was free spoleecemen," said she, beginning like a true artist with the strong, conspicuous points of her narrative, "took Daddy along like carrying a Guy, only the spoleeceman he pictited me up and held me inside of the skirting for Daddy for to kiss me. And Daddy, he says why didn't I call out like he told me 'Pi-lot!' so he could hear?..."

"But was Daddy being carried on a chair?" The reference to a Guy has complicated matters.

"Not a chair to set upon. A hospital-barrer. With skirtings. Yass! But I hadn't called out Pi-lot, so Daddy could hear..." Lizarann's conscience torments her on this point, which is one her hearer cares very little about. He wants to find out what hurt Daddy's leg, and the extent of the damage. He waits a moment to listen; thinks he hears a silence in the next room, as though Simon Magus had vanished and left his victim in peace. Something like knocking about of furniture follows. But the drunkard is safe locked in. He can do no great harm for a few minutes anyhow.

"Was it an accident, or did he tumble down of himself?" he asks. He knows the child will understand. A mere fall on a slippery pavement would hardly rank as an accident with her. An accident, unclassified otherwise, almost implies a vehicle, among this class of Londoners.



“Yass!—an accident. The boy said so.” A self-explanatory boy, the speaker seems to think. The hearer accepts him as explained. But what was the accident, and how much was Daddy hurt? Didn’t the boy tell? Gradually all that Lizarann has to communicate is elicited, and Mr. Taylor takes a cheerful view of the outlook.

“Then Daddy’s gone to the Hospital? They’ll set Daddy on his legs again. What does Daddy do for his living?”

“He’s a Asker. Askin’, he does. Yass!” Lizarann’s large dark eyes, and her gravity, added force to this. “Every dye, by the Rilewye Stytion, where I goes to fotch ’im.”

Athelstan Taylor gave a low whistle. “Oho!—*that’s* where we are, is it?” He at once recognised the little girl whose fame had reached him from the great house at Royd, with which he was of course in frequent communication. “You’re Lizarann Coupland, then; Lady Arkroyd’s friend?”

“Yass!” said Lizarann, nodding. Not that she was sure of it. But she knew there was a Lidy, come to see Teacher at School, she did; and she couldn’t have been certain, off-hand, that this wasn’t the Lidy’s nime, in the face of the gentleman’s statement. So she assented. She felt rather proud. Her daddy was well spoken of among the *élite* evidently. She continued: “And the boy said, he did, they could mike Daddy’s leg well any day of the week at the Sospital, because they done his Aunt and Uncle. And a gentleman was a corpse they done, out of a shore. And Mr. Parker’s teef they done, as good as new! So they was all *singin’*! Yass—they *was*!” This came in instalments; our report is shortened, for convenience.

Athelstan Taylor said afterwards to his friend: “I was getting so sleepy by that time, that I didn’t above half enjoy the little maid’s hopeful chatter about her Daddy, which of course I confirmed. I had to commit it to memory to laugh at it afterwards.” Indeed, his great strength and endurance had been sorely taxed by the trying nature of his long vigil; mere sitting up all night he would have made light of.

When Aunt Stingy appeared a few minutes after, having

been employed in lighting the kitchen fire as projected, she found Lizarann still on Mr. Taylor's knee, kept warm in the extemporised wrap, and filling in the blanks in her narrative, in reply to his cross-questionings. With a curious lack of tact and insight, Mrs. Steptoe immediately denounced her niece's presumption, suggesting that the child had taken the gentleman by storm, as it were; and alleging that little g'yells ought to know better how to behave than that. The gentleman cut this ill-judged attempt to creep up his sleeve very short indeed.

"Now listen to me, if you please, Mrs. . . . what's your name? . . . oh—Steptoe. Mrs. Steptoe. I am going at once to get the nearest doctor to see your husband. And I think the best thing you can do will be to leave him quiet in the front room till I come back. He won't take any harm. And I hope when I come back I shall find the little girl dressed, with a nice warm fire to warm herself at. I suppose you can't get any breakfast for her yet awhile? . . . Well!—do what you can in that direction. Yesterday's milk is better than no milk." And with a very decisive refusal to take a cup of tea at any future time, on any terms, he buttoned his coat tight round him, and left the room. Lizarann heard the street-door open and close, and then she was left friendless and alone with a formidable aunt. That good woman stepped out after the street-door closed, and listened a moment at that of the front room, but finding all silent did not open it. She saw it had been locked, as the key had been inside overnight. Evidently her visitor had locked it.

She returned and afflicted Lizarann by a destructive co-operation in the gettin' of her frock on, a form of help that twitched its victim to and fro under the pretext of promoting her stability; that resented her offered assistance and denounced it as henderin'; that left her penalised by a sense of wrong hooks in wrong eyes, buttons adrift from their holes, and holes aghast at the intrusion of strange buttons. But Lizarann was used to this, and discerned in it the shortness of her aunt's temper. Her Daddy he'd always said poor Auntie she couldn't help her nater, and we must bottle up according. Lizarann beheld her aunt through a halo of Jim's patience and forgiveness.



Athelstan Taylor soon found the doctor in Cazenove Street, who came readily in answer to his summons. It wouldn't do to lose sight of the case, he said. The man, who was quite well known to him as a typical case of Alcoholism, to the police as an habitual drunkard, and to the neighbourhood as always the worse for liquor, might very easily die of collapse if he wasn't carefully nourished when the reaction came. He would be much safer in a Hospital. Often in cases of this sort, life or death would turn on an injection of morphine on the spot. Heart-failure might be very rapid. He spoke as though Mr. Steptoe's decease would be a real calamity. Mr. Taylor, tramping beside him through the snow, tried to shape a thought that hung in his mind. How if he himself, who preached a Resurrection or Hereafter that as like as not this scientific gentleman did not believe in—how if he was less keen to preserve this depraved life, as a chance to clean it up a bit for a wholesomer departure later on, than the doctor in his professional enthusiasm, his sportsmanlike eagerness to win in a game of Therapeutics against Death? He felt a little ashamed of having thought more than once that the miserable victim of vice would be "best out of the way." Out of the way!... where? And then, how did he know that this consensus of all mortals to try and save even the most worthless lives may not be an unconscious tribute to the underlying sense of immortality throughout mankind? Would an honest belief in extinction fight to preserve a life that is a pain to itself and a curse to its neighbours? So thinking, he turned with his companion into Tallack Street. "Last house on the right, isn't it?" said the doctor.

What was that policeman doing in front of the last house on the right? Looking about on the snow as though in search for something, and then stooping forward over the low railing to examine the window-fastenings. It was all secure there when Athelstan Taylor came away. He quickened his pace, and the doctor did so too.

"Anything wrong, officer?" Both ask the question at once.

"Couldn't say, Sir. Be so good as not to tread on these footmarks. I want 'em kept till my relief comes. He'll

be here in a few minutes. . . . No—the window's not been tampered with, so far as I see. That's where it's so queer."

All three stand silent a moment. Then both gentlemen exclaim at once that they see. The queerness is clear enough to both. The footsteps on the snow all point away from the window, and a glance shows that there is no corresponding track of an approach to it.

None of the three seem to think the mystery soluble, for the moment, and mere speculation is useless. The policeman supplies an additional fact, but does not claim importance for it. The hasp of the window is visibly unclosed through the glass. But—so the officer testifies—they don't shut 'em to, as often as not.

"You can open it from outside," says the parson-gentleman to the policeman. "All right! I was coming to the house. I know the people."

"All right, officer!" says the doctor-gentleman. "You know me. Dr. Ferris, Cazenove Street." And thus encouraged the constable easily throws up the window from without. A touch on the shutters, and they open inwards. They reveal an empty room, and the track of the footsteps away from the window is at once explained—fully to the two who knew that a delirious man was the only tenant of the room, and clearly enough for purpose of action to the third, who only sees that some person, to whom the exclamation of both at once, "He has escaped!" applies, has been able to close the window behind him to disguise his flight, and may by now be far away at the end of a long trail they all start to follow, running through the snow as best they may. It is difficult to run, as the drifted snow is nearly knee-deep sometimes. But here and there the wind has kept the ground clear, blowing it like dry dust.

The track goes straight to the closing fence at the street end, at a point the youthful marauders of Tallack Street have chosen for inroads into the railway territory beyond. It is passable, for those who can climb a little, and whose clothes do not mind nail-rip or paint-stain. As the three follow one another over this obstacle, Athelstan Taylor and the doctor send back a shouted word or two of reassurance to whoever it is that has opened the house-door and come out with a cry of alarm—woman or child or both.



They do not stop to see which, but get on as fast as possible. The track ends for a few yards where the railway arch has made a gap in the snow, but it is soon found on the other side, and then is easy to follow over a desolation of land ripe for building—ripe for the creation of ground-rents—ripe with the deadly ripeness we all know so well, of the land that the hay will never smell sweet upon again, the land that even now awaits interminable streets of dwellings no man or woman of the days to come shall ever think of as a home in childhood. Easy to follow as it lies clear in the thick snow it has had all to itself, and will have till the road is reached that leads to the Refuse Destroyer, with its two hundred feet of chimney-shaft, from which a black cloud is pouring—presumably of refuse that has refused to be destroyed ; or has reappeared after destruction in an astral body, or suppose we say disastral—and the canal, and the Breweries, and the Chemical Bottled Stout Works, and the Artificial Food Works the Sewage Appropriation Company, Limited, are building down Snape's Lane this side of the canal-basin.

The track goes straight to the road, but on reaching it swerves aside, baffled by a hedge, or the memory of what was once a hedge, whose function has been reinforced by barbed wire ; probably the last expiring effort of a pastoral age to induce sheep to remain on the land and be tempted by the dirty grass. The swerved footsteps follow on to an opening two sad stumps face one another in, and think, perhaps, at times of the days when they were a stile, and real villagers stepped over them, and distant London was unknown. Then the track is lost for a space in a maze of other tracks of men on their way to brew, to bottle stout chemically, to appropriate sewage, that artificial food may be stocked, in tins, for a race with powers of digestion up to date. Then is found again, and followed on to a canal-bank with Platonic locks that sleep sometimes from day's end to day's end, bargeless, and dream of a past when railways were unknown, and they were full of purpose, and the world was young. And then is lost again, at a bridge.

Stragglers are gathering round, anxious to satisfy curiosity about the nature of the search ; also anxious to impart information about its object, whether possessed of

any or not. Willingness to further the public interest, without any qualifications or data to go upon, is often a serious hindrance to the end in view. In this case several casuals, who have *not* seen a man in his shirt-sleeves, without ne'er a hat on, go by, are so anxious to mould the particulars of something else they *have* seen into a plausible substitute for information about the said man, that the necessity for hearing enough of their evidence to reject it becomes an obstacle trying to the patience of the searchers. It seems injudicious to snub a volunteer informant who see a party go along the road in the opposite direction rather better than an hour ago, with a sack over his head and shoulders, who "might have been a dorg-fancier, to look at, in the manner of describing him," and to tell him to shut up if he can't go any nearer than that; not only because this drastic treatment may discourage other informants who have really something to tell, but because, being put on his mettle, he proceeds to adjust his evidence to the facts, so far as he can ascertain them. He removes the sack from the head of his recollection, makes it walk the other way at any acceptable time; won't undertake, now you ask so partic'lar, that it hadn't shirt-sleeves, and surrenders the dog-fancier in favour of any vocation you are inclined to put a leading question about. In like manner, a party sim'lar to you describe come straight—according to other proffered testimony—acrost yarnder open ground to this very self-same spot, and so forrard over the bridge to'ards the Princess Charlotte down the lane, and went in at the bar. But the photographic likeness of this person to any description you choose to give of the man sought for fails to establish the identity of the two, as he was seen on the previous day, maybe about dinner-time. Compromise is impossible; the informant stands committed to yesterday, past recall.

But the track on the snow is lost—that is the one fact clear. Give it up and go back?—is that the only course open to us? Not when the chase ends so close to a canal-lock. True, the footsteps do not go to the edge, but only because a wind-swept skirting of brick pavement is clear of snow. The last one is none so far off the stone curb, above the water. Look down into the empty lock, and think!



The parson and the doctor represent intelligent speculation ; the policeman, official reserve ready to listen to information and compare it with his pre-omniscience ; the gathering crowd of early workmen, the uselessness of defective reasoning powers brought to bear on insoluble problems.

After a moment the parson speaks to the doctor : “ The ice is broken over there—just where the water is running in.”

“ Are you sure ? ” asks the doctor. “ Isn’t it only the wash of the water melting it off ? But your eyesight is better than mine, I expect.”

“ No, there’s a broken edge. The water-wash would scoop and leave a curve.”

“ What do *you* think ? ” the doctor asks the policeman, who replies briefly : “ Gentleman’s right, perhaps. Worth trying, anyhow ! . . . Now then, some of you, idling round, I want that bit of ice broke up—against the lower gate. Look alive now ! . . . Yes !—a couple of planks and a short ladder and a yard or so of scaffold-cord. Get ’em anywhere round ! I’m answerable. Never you mind what anyone says—just you take ’em ! ” And the leading casuals, probably labourers on the building job down the lane, are off at a trot to requisition planks and cords. But not without establishing a slight collateral grievance, in the manner of their kind : “ You’ve only got to *name* what you want, and we’ll *get* it fast enough. Who’s to know what you’re askin’ for, exceptin’ you speak ? ”

Athelstan Taylor’s surmise of course was that Uncle Bob had ended his run by falling into the lock at the upper end, where the ice was thin ; and, breaking through it, had passed below the thicker ice, where he remained—probably jammed against the lower gate, which was closed. He noticed that this conjecture was at once accepted, but that no living soul of all those present referred to it in words. Silence is kept about it, but for a word between himself and the doctor, even till after the planks and cords and ladder have come, and the planks are laid athwart the sounder ice at the lower gate. One man can stand on them safely without fear of its giving—perhaps two. But one can break the ice with a pick fast enough, as soon as he can get at it. Hand him down a shovel to clear the snow a bit !

The parson is feeling sick at heart with his long night's vigil, and as though he could hardly face the dreadful end. He shrinks back, not to see more than he need. Then from the depths of the lock comes the crackling sound of the ice that breaks beneath the pick. Then the tension of the growing excitement as those on the brink watch for a result they feel confident of.

"Nothing there?" . . . "Nothing that side." . . . "Now you keep steady across with your peck—right you are!—across the middle . . . don't go to sleep! . . . yes, now right up in the corner. . . . Something there?" . . . "Ah!—easy a minute till I catch holt . . . have that cord ready. . . . Got him?"

\* \* \* \* \*

"You are quite certain nothing can be done?"

"Absolutely certain. He was ready for heart-failure, without being an hour under the ice."

"Will you tell the poor woman, from me, that I had no choice but to go? And that poor baby. . . ."

"Is there a baby?"

"Well—little girl of six then! Say I'll come at three to take her to see her father at the Hospital. You're sure it's the same case?"

"Not the least doubt. A blind sailor beggar—there couldn't be two. You know the wards at St. Brides. . . . Never mind—you'll find out. . . . What is it, my good woman?"

It is a woman with a tale to tell. Briefly, that she looked out of her bedroom window about an hour and a half since, and saw what must have been the unhappy inebriate running across the field, looking back, time and again, as if he see some party follering of him. Then he come to the lock, and stood close over the edge—back to, as you might say. So standing, he went wild, on the sudden, and threw up his arms, and there!—he was over in the lock, afore you could reckon him up like—clear over! Both her hearers are indignant, or perhaps incredulous about the truth of the story. For if she really saw this, why in Heaven's name did she give no alarm?—the man's life might have been saved! She expresses contrition as for



an error of judgment, but no great remorse. She told her master—meaning her husband—who said it was a queer start. But it was that early ! The exact bearing of this fact on the matter was far from clear.

“ She’ll have to tell her tale before the coroner, anyhow,” said the doctor, as he showed his companion a short-cut into his road home. “ Well !—now keep straight on—you’ll be in the main road in five minutes. I hope you’ll get a good breakfast and a good sleep before you marry those two sinners. Good-bye ! Remember, straight on !”

For the Rev. Athelstan had told this gentleman of a binding engagement that he had to keep that morning as *locum tenens* at St. Vulgate’s. He had with difficulty persuaded a navvy to remedy an omission in his duties towards the mother of his family, whom he had never led to the Altar of Hymen ; and the said navvy had consented to do so this morning, and was rather entering into the fun of the thing. But if the parson were to fail in his appointment, was it certain that the delinquent would be brought to the scratch a second time ?

However, he had still time for breakfast and rest before this appointment was due. So he walked briskly on through the thick snow, sad at heart, but wonderfully little the worse physically for his terrible experience. And as he walked he shuddered as he thought of the unhappy case of Alcoholism, flying over the spotless virgin snow from God knows what, to his death. “ I suppose Simon Magus had got out, after all, and was sharp on his heels,” said the Rev. Athelstan, and then added : “ At any rate, I’m glad it was me, not Gus !”

## CHAPTER XV

IF the doctor-gentleman had not brought back assurance of the reappearance of the New Policeman who had rescued Lizarann, the child might have been more on the alert about the events of the previous night that concerned Uncle Bob. But she had no doubt her rescuer would come back. And this anticipation, as well as the hopeful tone in which he had spoken of Daddy's prospects at the Hospital, set her mind at ease on that score; the whole occurrence, *delirium tremens* included, presenting itself to her merely as exaggerated domesticity. It was Uncle Bob, only rather more so.

Seen from her point of view, the events that had preceded Uncle Bob were that Daddy had been in collision with a Pickford's Van, and had suffered, but not murderously, from the accident; that he had not been able to walk, because of his leg; and that he had been carried away by well-disposed officials to an institution that promoted soundness of wind and limb, and had even been known to make its *bénéficiaires* musical. A child's mind knows no proportion; and the last item, which was really a gratuitous invention of the boy whose name was not Moses, gained credence with Lizarann slowly, and ended by throwing every other particular into the shade. Further, she knew that Uncle Bob, considered as an infliction, had been worse—for he was to her merely an endemic disease that increased or diminished, like gout—and that he had run out in the snow. Nothing abnormal in that; besides, the police, new and old, had run after him, to say nothing of the doctor-gentleman from the house with "Surgery" wrote up big, where you could get a supply of medicine if you said where you come from, and took back an exhausted bottle with a surprisingly high number on it, considering its pretensions. And these events having passed muster as normal, what followed was only natural.



Her aunt had shown at first dispositions to join the chase, but had desisted in consequence of remonstrance from neighbours, who had begun to be aware that history had been in the making during the night at Steptoe's; he, though chronic the previous evening, having become acute in the small hours of the morning. Mrs. Hicks and Mrs. Hacker, and others, having trooped round the vortex of excitement, had counselled Aunt Stingy to remain where she would be of some use, and not go canterin' over the buildin' land with no object, in the manner of speaking. Wasn't three plenty?

Jimmy 'Acker, told off to follow the trail in the snow and bring back word if he see 'em coming, had come back uneasy and evasive, had told contradictory stories about what he see, and had confirmed the public belief in the untrustworthiness of boys. Questioned, during ostracism, by his sister and Lizarann, his replies had been mysterious, and his refusal to make them less so unintelligible. The expression, "Just you wait and see if what I told you ain't k'rect," laid claim to having said something, sometime; and no effort of his hearers' memory confirmed his having done so. Other emissaries departed to get information, and did not come back.

This state of uncertainty had been ended by the reappearance of the policeman and the doctor, who climbed back over the fence followed by straggling units from among those who had witnessed the scene at the lock. Everyone can read something written about Death on the faces of those who have just seen him.

"Now which of you women was this man's wife?" That was what Lizarann had heard the policeman—the old sort; she looked in vain for her glorious friend—say to wifehood within hearing. Whereupon Aunt Stingy became on a sudden hysterical, and was helped, gasping and crying, into the house. Lizarann wanted to go too, moved by pity for she knew not what—for something folk were speaking under their breath about to one another, not to her; nodding about, pointing about, to something past or present, beyond the railway-arch; drawing morals about and referring to their own foresight about. Then she had heard the voice of the doctor-gentleman:

“ Which of you youngsters is his little girl ? . . . Hadn’t got a little girl, hadn’t he ? . . . Oh ah !—of course he hadn’t. . . . I should say—which is the little girl whose dad’s hurt his leg and gone to the Hospital ? . . . Ah, to be sure !—Lizarann. Now, Lizarann, suppose you get your bonnet and wrop yourself up as warm as you can and come along o’ me to Teacher at the School, just till Mr. Taylor comes to go to see Daddy with you. The big gentleman ? . . . just him, and nobody else. Come along !” Which Lizarann did, with alacrity. Daddy was in view again.

Then had come a very pleasant phase of what had really seemed more a dream than a reality, all along, to Lizarann. She had found herself being fed and washed and dressed and generally succoured by Miss Fossett, otherwise Teacher, at her private residence next door to the School, after the departure of the doctor-gentleman who left her there. She couldn’t for the life of her make out whether it was good news or bad news he had been telling Teacher under his breath. All she knew was that she was somehow appointed to go to Daddy in the Hospital, and that nothing else mattered. Even had she known the tragedy of the morning, it would only have been the fact of Death that would have appalled her—not the loss of the man who died. Practically, the grave was already closing over the remains of Uncle Bob, or the chief part of them. Decision on that point scarcely rests with ignorance though ; who shall say that even Alcoholism can efface a soul ? Nips won’t, however frequently took ; a germ always remains. At least, that is our experience, or an inference from it.

It is always pleasant to feel at liberty to over-indulge a child, and Miss Fossett, a good-natured woman that might have married—that describes her—interpreted something the doctor had told her about Daddy as a licence to do so in this case. So Lizarann enjoyed herself thoroughly—may almost be said to have been pampered—in the interval between the doctor’s departure and the arrival of the Rev. Athelstan. When the latter came, as promised, Miss Fossett had said something to him with concern, under her breath, and he had replied in a strain as of reassurance, to judge from his tone : “ Never you mind the doctor,



Addie. Like enough he was mistaken. Besides, he said he thought they might save it." Which, half-heard by Lizarann, only left an impression on her mind of the hospital staff on its knees hunting in the gutter for poor Jim's takings in coppers, spilt from his pocket last night when he met with this accident. Also at the moment Lizarann was doing some arithmetic by herself, *hors de concours*, and honestly believed she was conferring a real kindness on Teacher by adding up rows of figures for her. She would have done them quicker, only she had to stop to lick and rub out each carried cipher after writing in the next one. Also, when she got the values wrong in an eight, which is difficult, she had to rub it out and do it all over again.

"Lizarann says two and two make four, but fifteen and twelve don't make twenty-seven." Lizarann thought Teacher said this rather maliciously. But she was prompt in self-justification.

"Not of theirselves. Not till you do them in a sum. Like this. . . ." And she did it.

"Quite right, Lizarann! Of course they don't. But two and two will make four if you leave 'em alone ever so. Isn't that it?" Thus the gentleman—a sympathetic soul!

"Yass!" And the little woman felt that justice had been done. But she didn't know why maturity should laugh, as it did.

"They may save it, of course," Miss Fossett continued. "I don't see what's to be gained by taking the child to the Hospital, myself. Only make her miserable! It won't be half as bad if it's a wooden leg and he's up and well, as seeing him in a hospital ward. Besides, Dr. Ferris said he couldn't be certain they'd let you see him."

"I fancy they would. I know a man there who would manage it, regular hours or no!"

"I don't mean that. I mean it might not be safe for the man himself. Just think!—suppose they have had to amputate both." Of course Lizarann heard none of this. They were in the next room, having left her engaged in arithmetic.

"Yes—he may be betwixt life and death. After all, we know nothing. When did Dr. Ferris say he would be at the Hospital? Is that the child coughing?"

“Is that you coughing, Lizarann?” Teacher raised her voice to ask, and Lizarann replied that she had “a stiss” in her side whenever she licked the slite. She licked it to try, and the experiment was crowned with success. She then tried to readjust something out of gear inside her by short coughs and wriggles. This did not seem so successful. Teacher lowered her voice again: “Mucous membrane,” said she, “or muscular.”

“Very likely. She’s had a deal of exposure though, snow and all. Let’s keep our eyes on her.” But Lizarann didn’t cough again, that time.

Nevertheless Miss Fossett seemed not quite easy in her mind about that cough, and when Mr. Taylor remarked that we ought to be thinking about starting, if we were to get to the Hospital by four o’clock, she said—only she pretended it was quite a sudden idea of hers—that if she spoke the truth she would really be much happier to have the child not go out of doors in all this terrible cold and slush. For it was a thaw, and an enthusiastic one; and, you see, Miss Fossett had come by her knowledge of mucous membranes and so forth in a sad curriculum of two courses; one of nursing a sister through phthisis to death; and the other, which was incomplete, of doing the like at intervals for a brother, with only a poor hope that it would end otherwise. So she knew all about it.

“I really should feel easier, Yorick,” she repeated. And Lizarann looked up from the slate to see who else was in the room, that Teacher could be speaking to. But seeing no one, and being a sharp little girl, she perceived that it was her friend the gentleman that was addressed. Only, of course, she couldn’t guess that it was a sort of nickname, given, years ago, to her brother’s schoolfellow by her friend the lady.

“I should, a good deal. It’s not the right sort of day at all for little girls with coughs. How shall we console her?”

“You must.”

“I suppose I shall have to, Addie. I always have to do all the dirty work.” This metaphor distracted Lizarann’s attention from two uneven numbers, one of which had to be took off the other and wouldn’t come out right. Did the New Police scrub underneath the beds, clear the flues



of sut, scour out the sink, and so on ? Impossible ! He went on : “ Look here, Lizarann ! You’re a good little girl, aren’t you ? ”

“ Yass ! ”

“ And you’re not going to cry—that’s about it, isn’t it ? ”

“ Ye-e-e—yass ! ” She is not quite so confident about this, but will conciliate public opinion to the best of her ability.

“ Well, Lizarann, the doctor says we mustn’t see Daddy till—till a day or two.” The small face clouds over pitifully. The disappointment is bitter. But Lizarann won’t cry—well !—not *yet*, anyhow. Yorick continues : “ I shall go to the Sospital to hear about Daddy, and come back and tell. But you mustn’t go yet, because it would hurt Daddy.” He conceals his consciousness of the background of tears to the child’s Spartan resolution.

“ You’ll see it will come though,” says Miss Fossett, saying good-bye at the street-door. “ She’ll have a good cry about it when you’re gone. . . . But oh dear !—what a lot of stories you have told that child, Yorick.”

“ Of course I did. You put it on me, Addie, and then you sneak out ! I call it mean. But oh dear !—what a lot of stories one does have to tell children ! ”

“ You never tell them stories about anything you think serious. I know you don’t.”

“ Yes, I do. I tell them as matter of knowledge what I know to be only matter of belief. They wouldn’t believe it if I didn’t say I knew it.”

“ But *you* believe it ? ”

“ I do. But I don’t know it. Good-bye, Addie ! I shall keep my promise about the Hospital, though, and bring the news back. Cosset over the little woman and console her.” Which Teacher really did to the best of her ability, but the fact is that though Lizarann was brave, she was inconsolable. And—what was bitterest of all—she felt that faith had been broken with her ; which, coming home too late to Miss Fossett, made her think that it might have been better to tell a child of Lizarann’s character the real reason why she wasn’t to go to Daddy. It was a doubtful point, though. Besides, it was far from certain, after all, that she could have seen Daddy if she *had* been

taken to the Hospital. It would have been the worst result of all to fail in that, and have all the exposure for nothing.

So the Rev. Athelstan—or Yorick—certainly thought, as he started to walk to St. Brides, meaning to avail himself of a townward-bound hansom if one should overtake him before he got to the tram. Omnibuses were all full, apparently, inside and out ; and the opportunity of enjoying a rapid thaw was open to those who had for three weeks been praying for one. Streets overwhelmed with insufferable slush, and what was beautiful clean snow only a few hours since turned to torrents of an inkiness defying explanation. Roads that made even the sufferer by the slides we so enjoyed the making of in the early morning wish that he, too, was on our side, and could benefit by them, and knock double-knocks on them and never tumble. And see them now, turned to mere ill-mixed morass—floating pea-soup ankle-deep ! Scavengers' carts that seemed to spill more than they removed, and persons of low ideals of energy losing sight of the objects for whose attainment they had been entrusted with brooms and rakes, and contented to do nothing particular with them, in rows. Malignant persons on roof-tops discharging wicked accumulations on unsuspecting heads, and shouting out “ Be-low ! ” at the moment of impact. Butcher's carts coming as close to you as possible, to splash mud in your mouth and inside your collar, and reaching the horizon long before you become articulate to curse them. And then that saddest of all depressing sights, the skater who has been warned off the ice that won't be dangerous for another hour at least, and is going home swinging his skates and doubting the benevolence of his Maker.

So onward, through abating suburb and increasing town, to the zone of the Effectual. Of impatient carts that won't wait for the snow to thaw, but snap it up and carry it away without offering to account for their conduct ; of mowing-machines fitted with Brobdingnag revolving hair-brushes that will have to be washed now to be put to their proper use again, after sweeping up all that equivocal mess parallel with the kerbstone ; of turncocks looking happy from human appreciation in great force, and alone able to cope with



obstructions or relaxations in the bowels of the earth whose nature we outsiders can only dimly guess at. So travelling onward, on foot and by tram, the Rev. Athelstan arrived at his destination, and slipping the fare he had provided for the cab he had discarded into the contribution-box at the gate, entered St. Brides Hospital.

"I didn't know you were in these parts, Taylor," said his friend, the House Surgeon. "Haven't seen you for a century. . . . Yes!—I know I am right. It's two years next Lady Day. How's the family? How's Miss Caldecott? . . . all right, are they? That's well. Now let's have a look at you. Turn round to the light. . . ."

"I'm all right."

"Didn't say you weren't. Let's have a look! Turn well round and show yourself. . . h'm!"

"Well!—what's the matter?"

"I thought as much! You've been dissipating, my man. *Your* sort of dissipation! What was it this time? You've been up all night, my good sir! It's no use your trying to deceive me."

"I will not deceive you, my sweet!" Mr. Taylor quoted Mrs. Gamp, and was understood. "I chanced upon a bad case of *delirium tremens* threatening its lawful wife with a knife, and I stayed to see it out. Poor fellow!"

"H'm!—why poor fellow?"

"Because I locked him up and went for the doctor round the corner. He said he knew you. Man of the name of Ferris. Good sort of little chap. . . ."

"I know him. Saw him yesterday—came to see a patient here. Well!—what did he say to your man?"

"He never saw him alive. While I was away the poor fellow escaped out of the room, ran a mile and a half through the snow, and pitched himself into a canal-lock. . . . Oh yes!—he was fished out dead from under the ice. . . ."

"Rather a good job, I should think. . . . However, perhaps I oughtn't to say that. . . ."

"Glad to hear you say so, Crumpton! It sounds hopeful."

"I didn't mean that way. I meant he might have been an interesting case. Anyhow, there's an end of *him*!"

"I wish I could think that. But suppose I tell you what

brings me here now : we can quarrel about the human soul after. I want to hear about a man that was brought in yesterday night, a blind sailor-beggar that was run over. Have you seen him ?”

“ Rather ! I helped to get his leg off, just above the knee. A very good case—a very good case !”

“ What does that mean ?—a very good case ?”

“ Means that if the limb hadn’t been taken off on the nail, septic poisoning might have set in—yes !—already ! By the merest chance Brantock was here when he was brought in—he’s our visiting surgeon, you know—and he operated immediately. . . . Save it ? Not a chance—arteries all torn—circulation stopped—nothing for it but the knife ! The other leg we may save. He has a splendid constitution. Couldn’t have kept him so long under chloroform else.”

“ The other leg ?”

“ Compound comminuted fracture of tibia and fibula, with extensive laceration of soft parts. Much extravasation. But vitality retained. Oh yes !—we may save that one. It’s in plaster of Paris. He was removed into the surgical ward an hour ago. Do you want to see him ?—he can’t talk, I fancy, and he’d better not try. He’s had a good deal of opium to allay pain, you see.”

“ *May* I see him ? I should like to say I have, to his little girl. Poor child ! The *delirium tremens* case was her uncle, and she has no mother. She’s the poor chap’s only child.”

The House Surgeon put a book he had been looking into as he talked, inside a desk and locked it ; wrote with extreme rapidity on half a sheet of note-paper as people write on the stage ; handed it to a chubby nurse who seemed to have been indulging optimism while waiting for it ; remarked to her, “ That’s three hundred and forty-nine. I’ll see about the other presently ;” and said to the Rev. Athelstan, briefly, “ Come along !”

Poor Jim was worse now, as far as his own feelings went, than when he spoke to Lizarann off of the hospital-barrer. *Then* he was, in his own eyes, a chap that had been knocked over and come by some damage to his legs, which a week in



hospital would set right. Pain enough !—ah, to be sure !—and what might you expect ? Not for to lie up in cotton-wool all the days of your life. As a Spartan, and as against pain, with the normal courage of his healthy hours upon him, Jim was matchless. Add to that, that when he said those few words to his little lass, all the pain was as nothing in itself, measured against the need that she should not know it.

It was that nasty suffocating stuff that knocked all the heart out of a man, getting at his innards and stopping his clock. For when the time came to shift Jim from the couch he was first laid on to the operating-table, and to place him under chloroform as a preliminary, he was conscious enough of much that was going on—had drawn his own inferences from the rapid undertone of consultation ending in a raised voice : “ Perfectly useless to try for the left. May save the right ! ” In that instant he gave no thought to his own share in the matter ; all he could think of was the coming of the knowledge to his child that her Daddy was legless as well as eyeless. Three things made up his universe—his little lass, a crushed and spoiled thing on a couch, and that mysterious thing, Jim’s Self, independent of both, but mad with anxiety for the former—until the chloroform came and made all three things Nothing.

However, Jim never knew he was Nothing, because he had no sooner swallowed the nasty stuff into his lungs than he was feeling very bad, and sick-like, on a bed he had never been moved to at all, to his very certain knowledge. And he was able to guess, although he could not move his limbs to test it, that he was in the form in which he was to fossilise. Then, as the slow rally of a splendid constitution against the shock began, there grew with it an intense longing to know what manner of figure he was going to cut when reinstated. Would it be one wooden leg or two wooden legs ? Would he be able to walk at all ? Would he, in short, be in trim to persuade his little lass that he was on the whole rather better off than before his accident ? He really thought of nothing else when awake. But he chiefly slept, rousing himself for dexterous doses of nourishment at short intervals. And when he slept, he dreamed, as folk dream whose pain opium has half quenched.

He would have done very well in his dreams if he could only have had them to himself, and been free from an awful *something* that ran through them all. Whereof the only certainty was that it was always the same, and a curse. Preferably, as to form, it was cubic and immovable, but of hideous weight. But then, it was by no means certain that it was not a continuous sound, a sustained hoot of appalling power and persistency that struck terror to the heart, and jarred the brain. Or was it a wild beast, that kept the ship's crew from going ashore? Or an evil fire Jim was hard at work to crawl away from, but could not, seeing that it could follow him on wheels? Or, hardest to describe of all—when he woke from his dream to recognise a fact he had recognised fifty times uselessly, that it was merely his pain and nothing else—was it a strange concerted action of malignant battalions, always coming nearer, never in sight? It made him sick to know that it was each and all of the others, just the same. Now if he could only have enjoyed his dreams—for, look you, he could see in his dreams, plain—he wouldn't have minded the pain, if he could only have kept it square and intelligible. It was just the confusion that made him so hot and dry, so unable to get properly *rangé*.

For instance, there was a dream of eight years back with Dolly in it. Dolly was Lizarann's mother, and the reason Lizarann was not called Dolly was that Aunt Stingy had always thought it such a *selly* name, and it had appeared to Jim that it couldn't much matter what anything so small was called. Its size was all he knew of it, and a milky flavour, and some squeaks. And Jim was in the dark, and Dolly in her grave, and nothing mattered.

Jim was in the dark now, with a vengeance; but he could dream Dolly out of her grave, and did it, in this dream. It was a dream of the day he met her, when he came off his first voyage, a mere boy, and a perfect stranger to her. There was the bar he and his mates off the *Pera* had trooped into for refreshment, just paid off and feeling good, with money in their pockets. There were the square bottles with names on the glass, and the round ones all over labels, and the pump-handles in a row that Dolly's red-faced cousin Jane, the barmaid, was in the confidence of, but



which everyone else would have pulled wrong. There, too, was the girl that came in behind the bar and berthed up alongside the red-faced cousin, just as Murtagh O'Rourke called back to him through the swing-door, "We're lavin' ye behind, James, me boy," and vanished. And the girl was Dolly—Dolly herself. Jim didn't know in his dream that he had married Dolly since, and that she was dead—not he! It was all new and young again, and in a moment he would hear Dolly say what she did then, when after some chat—during which the eyes of each saw the other solely, Dolly's flinchingly, Jim's greedily—the red face was called away and left them. Yes!—he knew what she would say, "You never daren't come across to me," and that he in defiance of all Law and Order would be over that bar like a shot, and then would be driven forth by the righteous rage of the returning barmaid, with the remains of a kiss on his lips, the spoil of war in this audacious enterprise. And all the sequel of the story—how Dolly ran after him to say he might come back, under reserves; and the lightning speed of their unsophisticated courtship, under none—all this he knew in the dream beforehand, but did not wonder why he knew it—took it as a matter of course.

It never came off, though, for the dream never got as far as the kiss, to Jim's bitter disappointment. Jane, the cousin, instead of clearing out and leaving the introduction to nature, swelled and became redder still, and very hot, and ended inexplicably by becoming the pain that had passed through so many vicissitudes. Whereupon Jim was awake in the dark, somewhere. And a man's voice, one good to hear, was saying: "I'll sit down by him and wait till he wakes, nurse. I promised little Lizarann I would see him."

"That's my little lass!" said Jim faintly. And the nurse said, "I thought I heard him speak." Then Jim felt that a big man came and sat beside him, who asked him what he had said. So he repeated, "The name of my little lass at home, master," and then had said all he could, and went off again in a drowse, and was far away in a new dream in two seconds. In perhaps five he woke again with a start, and said: "Have ye been here long, master?"

But his mind must have travelled quick from the dream he was in, and his place in it. For he had to come back to bed No. 146 at St. Brides Hospital from Singapore—from the hold of a ship a Malay sailor had hidden himself in, after running amuck through the decks, wounding right and left. And Jim and Ananias Driscoll, the second mate, were the only men who would dare to ferret him out in the dark, with a horn lantern and loaded revolvers, to use in earnest if need was. And, mind you!—the fugitive might have put fire to the ship, as lief as not, except they caught him. Now the bilge in this ship, or something broke out of a cask in the hold, had a powerful bad smell with it, that had a mortal strange effect on your legs. And when Jim said so to Driscoll, a voice came that was not Driscoll's, and Jim became aware that he was somehow in a trap, and woke just in time to escape it. But the smell of that bilge was the pain of Jim's foot; for the foot was there still, for all it had been cut off and carried away in a pail. And the voice that had seemed Driscoll's, which was quite an unnatural one for a sailor with earrings, and a crucifix tattooed on his chest, was identified halfway by Jim's waking sense, and Singapore had melted.

"Scarcely a minute," said the man who sat beside him, completing Driscoll's speech. Which seemed incredible to Jim, after that affair at Singapore. But he let it pass, the more so that at that moment the nurse brought him something in a cup, which made him feel better.

"You was so good as to mention, master . . ."

"Your little girl? Yes—I saw her, an hour since. . . . Look!—I'll put my ear down, close. Needn't try to raise your voice!" For Jim had something he wanted to say badly.

"You'll not be mentioning any matters to my little lass, sir," said he slowly. And then, as though he felt his words were a little obscure: "You might chance to be saying something regarding of the matter of my fut. Ye see, master, a young child don't take these-like things as easy as we do, and my little lass's heart will be just abroke about her Daddy's fut. I'd take it very kind of ye if ye'd make any sart of a bit of contrivance like, only for a short spell o' deception, just till I get the heart in me to make



a game of it all. It's the chloroform done it. A fair casualty don't knock all the heart out of a man. . . ."

"Your little girl will have to know about it in the end."

"Ah!—in the end—yes! But then . . . a wooden leg! See the difference! Why, I can most hear the lass laughing at it." Jim paused a few seconds to enjoy Lizarann's imagined hilarity, then added: "Ye'll keep it snug about my fut, master? A stump's a stump, ye know."

"She shan't be told any particulars yet, Coupland. Don't try yourself talking too much." For Jim's long speech has made his breath come short, and his last words are almost inaudible. He submits to listening. "The doctor has told me all about the accident. You'll have to have a wooden leg. Let me tell you about Lizarann." The way the speaker, whoever he is, accents the child's name, makes a family friend of him at once. Jim, with a vague picture in his mind of a sort of guardsman with quiet manners, moves his own big right hand, hot and weak now, as it lies on the coverlid. It is taken by another as big, and the image of the guardsman is confirmed. Its voice suits the hand, and continues: "We thought it best for her not to come—Miss Fossett and I did. You know Miss Fossett, at the National School."

"Sure!" Jim's intonation acknowledges Miss Fossett, with approval in it. Athelstan Taylor had made up his mind how much it would be safe to tell of last night's work, so he continued:

"Your little maid and I made friends early this morning. I was passing by your house, and she came running out. Her uncle had been drinking, and his behaviour had frightened her. . . . What's that?" He stoops down again to hear, and Jim tries for clearer speech:

"The Devil he'll take Bob Steptoe one of these odd-come-shortlies, or I'm a liar. Only I wish he'd . . ."

"Wish he'd what?"

"Be alive about it—look a bit smarter! What was his game this time, master?"

"He was drunk and violent, and I had to control him. He's quiet now. I'll tell you more, Coupland, when you are stronger."

"Very right, sir!"

"I'll tell you now about Lizarann. I carried her off to Miss Fossett's—with her aunt's consent, of course. The poor little woman had had a bad time, you see. She wanted consolation badly after your accident, and not being able to come to you. And her aunt's a good woman, but . . ."

"She ain't that sort of good woman . . . t'other sort !"

"Well, perhaps ! Anyhow, I made her wrap Lizarann up, and trotted her off to the School. Miss Fossett's got her there now, and she's in good hands. . . ."

"You mustn't spin it out too long, Taylor." Thus the Doctor's voice, as his footsteps stop by the bed-end. He comes to the other side of the bed, and lays his finger on the near pulse. "Magnificent constitution ! Everything in his favour ! Splendid case—pity to spoil it ! Give you seven minutes more by the clock. Look in to say good-bye as you go." He is gone, and Jim is conscious of the slight rustle of a nurse, on the watch to pounce, hard by.

"I must tell you what I came for, Coupland. Of course I wanted to find how you were, and take back word to Lizarann." Mr. Taylor has to speak quickly. "But I wanted to ask something of you."

"Give it a name, master !"

"I wanted to ask your consent to our keeping her—I should say to Miss Fossett keeping her—at the School till you are about again. She shall be well cared for. I know I am asking you to trust . . ." He stopped ; Jim's lips were moving.

"You're the School-lady's brother, belike ?"

"Not quite, but that sort of thing ! Her brother and I were at College together. He is doing my work in the country, and I am doing his at St. Vulgate's at Clapham."

"That parson gentleman—he'd be her brother. Him I heard cough ?" For the brother and sister, interested in Lizarann, had visited Tallack Street, and interviewed Jim.

"Him you heard cough. That's it !"

"But *he* can't do no work, poor chap !—not work in the country."

"My work in the country is the same as his in London. Only not so hard. And the country air does his cough good."

"Oh, master !—ye never mean to say *you're* a parson !"



Jim's voice rises with the poignancy of his disappointment. To him, every cleric is the Rev. Wilkinson Wilkins, the spiritual adviser of Aunt Stingy.

"I'm not a very bad one, Coupland. At least, I hope not." There is humility in the speaker's tone, and recognition of the aggressive and objectionable character of Cures of Souls, but a germ of a good-humoured laugh buried in it. The seven minutes are near their end, and the nurse, considered as a rustle, is increasing. She means action in a moment.

"I'll be your bail for that, master." But Jim cannot quite conceal his disappointment. He had formed such a high ideal of his visitor. Still, he can and does show his faith in him by spending the rest of his available speech-strength on a few words of gratitude to Lizarann's protectors, and assenting without conditions to the proposed arrangement. But when will he be "about again"? The nurse throws eight weeks, somehow, into her expression, without speech, and the forgiven parson interprets for the blind man's hearing.

"Quite a month, Coupland. But I will bring your little girl to see you the moment the doctors will allow me. Now, good-bye!"

Alas, poor Yorick! He had been so enjoying his company—company that had neither respect for his cloth, nor contempt for his cloth, nor indifference to his cloth; that, in fact, knew nothing about his cloth—and rejoicing in Jim's free speech, that would have been cramped here and crimped there had the speaker known he was addressing a parson-gentleman. It was like stepping back into the old days before he took clerk's orders; days when he was still uninsulated, still one with his kind. And yet there was never a man with a more earnest belief in his inherited mission to fight the Devil in any of the half-score of Churches that look askant at one another, and waste good powder and shot over the creeds their congregations shout in unison, knowing all the while that one or more of the chorus may be—must be—uttering a lie. Athelstan Taylor had donned the cloth he wore simply because it was the uniform of his territorial regiment in the army that, as he conceived, was being for ever enrolled in the service of Ormuzd against

Ahrimanes. In his enthusiasm to fight beneath the banner of his division of the army, the Cross, he had ridden roughshod over a hundred scruples on petty details ; and the consequence was that his most earnest admirers were often fain to shake their heads over his lawless expressions of opinion on sacred subjects, and to lament that Taylor, with so many fine points in his character, should be on vital points of Doctrine so painfully unsound. It was an open secret on the part of both Augustus Fossett and his sister that they prayed for Athelstan ; the former with a belief as real as he was capable of that the wanderer would be guided ; the latter with a practical misgiving that a very large number of thoughtful persons had *not* been guided, or so many samples would not be to be found outside the Communion of the English—and Roman—Churches. For too many of her brother's idols had "gone over" for it to be possible to pool the latter in the sum total of orthodox, heterodox, and cacodox dissidents. Of which last, in connection with this brother's and sister's petitions to the Almighty to guide Athelstan into their way of thinking, the one they preferred to call Socinianism was the most poisonous and insidious. A creed baited with mere veracities, to get a bite from the unwary !

As for Athelstan, every time he came to take his friend's burden off his shoulders in London he felt more clearly than before how apt he was to lose sight of even Ormuzd and Ahriman in a blind struggle against the brutalism and debauchery, and filth and disease, of a London outskirt well up to its date. Encouraged at first by the tidiness of the last-built bee-lines of bricks and mortar, he had half hoped a compromise was being found between purchasing a sense of Christianity for the rich at the cost of indefinite multiplication of the poor, and passing sentence of death on those unable either to enjoy living on nothing, or to give anything in exchange for something. But as soon as he began to get behind the scenes his poorer parishioners were enacting, he saw and heard every day things that had dashed this hope ; and by the time of the story had quite come to the conclusion that the small population whose souls he was supposed to be looking after were as vicious as the Court of Charles the Second, and so idle as to affirm



the right of male mankind to sixteen hours out of twenty-four to eat, drink, sleep, and do nothing in—slight exceptions to the last, to nobody's credit, being allowed for. Of course it was an exaggerated feeling on Athelstan's part; one thing was that he could not reconcile himself to the ubiquitous *fætor* of the beer in which, speaking broadly, his flock—who didn't acknowledge him as their shepherd at all—lived and moved and had their being. Under exasperation, he thought of them in that way . . . and forgave them !

Miss Fossett interrupted a reverie to this effect, by saying to him, as he arrived, after striding five miles in an hour through the slush and drizzle : “ I've had to put that child to bed.”

“ Hullo !—nothing bad, I hope ?” What a damper ! And he had looked forward so to the small anxious face, and the consolation he was going to give it. All his clients were not so nice as Lizarann.

“ Dr. Ferris said he wasn't sure if it was pleurisy. It might be *pneumonia*.”

“ Doctor's been, then ?”

“ Oh yes !—I sent for him. She's been poulticed ever since.”

“ Hope it's all a fuss about nothing.”

“ I hope so. Here's a visitor, Lizarann. Now don't you jump up !”

## CHAPTER XVI

IN a town-house of the Arkroyd order, a certain dramatic interest attaches to the morning meal that is not shared by any later one. Nobody knows who will come down to breakfast, except perhaps some confidential lady's-maid ; and *she* won't tell, as often as not. So that the knights-harbingers of fresh toast and tea and coffee can always enjoy a little sport in the way of wagers as to who will take which, and which of the young ladies will be up—or down, which is the same thing—before ten. The pleasurable excitement which those who play cards feel, before they pick their packs up and know the worst, is akin to theirs, only less. Because the cards may be snapped up the moment it isn't a misdeal ; while the tension is prolonged for the watcher who speculates beside a well-laid table as to whether the methyated will last out under the urn till one of the ladies appears to make tea, or will sputter and fizz and have to be taken out and refilled, and very likely the wick too short all the time !

Lunch is different. People make a point of lunch, or else declare off, and don't come home at all. Those who do not comply with this rule are Foolish Virgins—and serve them right ! Our own experience, an extended one, points to the impossibility of being too late for breakfast. There may be a case—but ! . . .

Anyhow, the same human interest does not attach to the question of who is, or isn't, coming to lunch. And as for tea, nobody cares a brass farthing ; because you can get tea somewhere else. On the other hand, dinner is a serious matter, and you must make your mind up ; and either come, or not.

This tedious excursion into the ethics of Breakfast is all owing to everybody coming down so late at 101, Grosvenor Square, on the morning after the last chapter. The story



is, as it were, kept waiting, and may as well indulge in a few reflections. Samuel, the young man who brought the chessboard at Royd, had to wait, and seemed able to do so without change of countenance. He very likely reflected, for all that.

It may have struck Samuel, when Miss Arkroyd made her appearance first of those expected by him, that when this young lady said, "Oh, nobody!" on entering, she did not seem sorry, and picked up her share of the morning's post from her plate to read nearer the fire quite resignedly. It was getting colder again, and folk were pledging themselves not to wonder if the wind were to go round to the north.

Judith looked at the outside of her mother's and sister's letters. Sibyl's interested her most; and she looked them all through carefully, numerous though they were. Why does one look at the directions on other people's letters? So Judith thought to herself, as she got disgusted with the monotony of the text on Sibyl's, and her inability to suggest any emendations. She was very honourable, for she read nothing but a signature or two on the numerous postcards. She was, in fact, only acting under the impulse which prompts the least inquisitive of us all, when we have undertaken to post a letter for a friend, to read the address upon it carefully before we insert it into the inexorable box, and feel inside to see that it hasn't stuck. Judith did not answer the question she asked herself; yet her reading of the same address again and again called more for explanation than that of the letter-poster; for the latter may be put on his oath in the end, if a letter fails to reach.

There were so many to "Miss Sybil Arkroyd" that she had become confused over the spelling of the name by the time its owner's footstep was heard on the stairs. However, she wasn't going to pretend she hadn't been reading them. "There's one for you from Betty Inglis," she said incidentally; and picking up her own letters from the table, took them with her to read by the fire. It was a morning to make the hardiest give in to the temptation of a hundred-weight of best Wallsend, blazing. Judith enjoyed it; so much so that a sense of a russet Liberty serge, baking, crept into the atmosphere as she sought in vain for an inlet into

an envelope cruelly gummed to its uttermost corner. When will envelope-makers have compassion for their customers' correspondents ?

"You're scorching, Ju. Or you will be directly." So spoke Sibyl, reading a letter attentively, and speaking through her absorption as to a world without. "Who was that ? . . . No—don't make the tea yet, Elphinstone. Coffee for me. You're coffee, I suppose, Ju ? . . ."

"Yes, coffee. Who was what ?"

"Who was that in your cab last night ? . . . Well, you made noise enough ! Of course I could hear ! I'm not deaf." The letter is read by now, being short, and Sibyl has come out into the world to hear the answer to her question.

But Judith is deep in half-a-quire of illegibility, after an episode of a fork-point, and some impatience. "It's an old dress," she says, and then ignores Sibyl altogether for a term, in favour of the letter. Her eyebrows had moved in connection with the cab-inquiry, up to the point of detection by a sharp younger sister. "I had no cab, dear," she says at last. "I came in Mr. Challis's cab." This is quite a long time after.

"Has Mr. Challis a cab ?"

"You know perfectly well what I mean, Sib."

Sibyl knows, but has become absorbed in a second letter. So she leaves her tongue, as her representative, to say fragmentarily, "Hansom cab off the rank," and then retires altogether into the letter for a moment. However, she comes out presently to say, "The question is, was it Mr. Challis ? I suppose it was, though, or it couldn't have been Mr. Challis's cab . . . oh no !—I'm not finding fault. It's all perfectly right as far as I'm concerned."

The respectable domestics have been in momentary abeyance, and the conversation has been more suggestive than it would have been in their presence. The reappearance of Mr. Elphinstone, with the gist of two breakfasts, causes an automatic adjournment of the subject. The day's appointments make up the talk, during his presence.

But so late was the quorum of the total breakfast—in fact, it was doubtful whether two of the constituent cujusses would appear at all—that Sibyl got ample oppor-



tunity for resuming the conversation exactly where it left off, at least a quarter-of-an-hour having elapsed.

"It's all perfectly right as far as I'm concerned," she repeated. "As long as Marianne doesn't mind!" The Christian name may have been an intentional impertinence.

"There is nothing for Marianne to mind, Sibyl."

Sibyl changes her ground unscrupulously. "It doesn't matter to me as long as *I'm* not his wife. But a hansom-cab is a hansom-cab, and you know it as well as I do."

"I do know it, dear." Judith speaks serenely. The attack is too puerile to call for resentment. "They try one's nerves and destroy one's skirts, getting in and out."

Sibyl's style has not been worthy of her Square, or Mr. Elphinstone. There was too much of the lowlier air of Seven Dials in the suggestion that a hansom-cab would promote an irregular flirtation to do more than provoke a smile. Charlotte Eldridge, even, would have condemned it as the bald scoff of inexperience.

But there was more maturity and force in Sibyl's next speech. "I want to know, are you going to tell the *madre* about it or not?" Judith flushed angrily as she answered her with: "I have told you, Sibyl, that as soon as there is something to tell, I will tell it at once to anyone it concerns. Mamma certainly!"

"How far has it gone?—that's what I want to find out."

"How far has what gone?"

"You needn't look so furious, Ju. Do let's talk quietly. You know perfectly well what I mean. This talk about a trial-performance." The imputation that Judith looked furious was a sporting venture. No doubt she felt furious, thought Sibyl; and how was she to know she didn't show it?

"I told you days ago there was no talk of a trial-performance."

Sibyl restrained herself visibly—too visibly for the prospects of peace. After some thirty seconds of self-command, she reworded her question mechanically. "The talk about something that was not to be a trial-performance." The forms of the court were complied with, without admission of previous lack of clearness. This was shown

in a *parti pris* of facial immobility. A licked lip, a scratched nose, an eye-blink, would have marred its dramatic force.

"You needn't look so stony over it, Sib. There's no mystery of any sort, and I can tell you about it in three words. Alfred Challis is anxious . . . what?"

"Nothing—go on!"

"Mr. Challis is anxious that I should get up enough of Aminta Torrington's part to give Mr. Magnus an idea . . . No!—Sibyl. Mr. Magnus is *not* vulgar, and I think him picturesque. He smokes too many very large cigars perhaps, and they don't improve his complexion. But what objection there can possibly be to diamond shirt-studs . . ."

Sibyl interrupted. "You may just as well tell it all out, Ju. What do you mean by 'enough'?"

"What do I mean by enough? Do be intelligible, Dandelion dear!" Judith is patronising.

"I wish you wouldn't call me by that hatefully foolish name. Yes—what do you mean by 'enough'? Does it mean that what Mr. Magnus has heard of what you can do *isn't* enough? That doesn't mean that he's heard nothing. And you know he hasn't."

Sibyl is really no match for her sister in the long run, and perhaps this is a sample of it—of a run long enough for her to get ruffled in. Judith's forbearance becomes exemplary. "Listen while tell I you," she says, imputing impatience, "what Mr. Magnus *has* heard; and then you can talk about it."

"Very well, go on!" snappishly.

"The suggestion came from Mr. Magnus. Alfred Challis . . . certainly!—it's his name. Don't be absurd. . . . Alfred Challis may have talked to him—no doubt has—of my fitness for the part. And yesterday between the acts he asked us into his room, and made us read one of the scenes. Of course I was Aminta, and Alfred Challis was Moorsom. It was where they meet for the first time at the oculist's at Vienna, in the waiting-room. . . ."

"Is that the kissing scene?"

"The kissing scene! Sibyl!—I'm sorry you read that manuscript. . . ."

"You shouldn't have left it lying about."



"It was in my bedroom, child. . . . Well!—it certainly wasn't what you choose to call the kissing scene . . . but it doesn't matter. I don't believe I should ever be able to make you understand how purely *professional* it all was. Mr. Magnus sat on the arm of a chair smoking, with his thumbs in his waistcoat, and said that sort of thing wouldn't go down with the public." Judith omitted Mr. Magnus's reason, which was that it wasn't half "schick" enough, or thick enough; for it wasn't clear which he said, as his tongue interfered with his articulation.

Sibyl listened, chafing. When no more seemed to be coming, she elected to treat the communication as a confession forced from reluctant lips. "You see I was right, after all," she said. "And it *was* Mr. Challis in the cab." The discontinuity of semi-accusation was bewildering, and refutation hung fire for a moment. She ran on, giving her sister no chance. "I really must say, Judith, that I do not understand you at all. But you must go your own way. Do you suppose—can you suppose—that *any* member of your family would approve of what is going on, if they knew it?"

At this point the fact that Judith is really much the cooler of the two tells. "I don't know whom you mean, Sib," she says temperately, "by *they*. No member of my family is plural, that I know of . . . well!—it isn't grammar, according to me. However, if you mean the *madre*, we shall very soon see; that is, if the thing doesn't turn out a flash in the pan. I shall tell her all about it at the proper time. . . ."

"Meanwhile, hold my tongue, you mean? I'm not at all sure, Judith, that any other sister in my place wouldn't at once tell her mother all she knew about such goings on. . . ."

"What are the goings on? I know of no goings on."

"I do. This visit to the back slums of a theatre, alone; I mean unaccompanied by any other lady. The impropriety—yes! impropriety—of the whole thing. . . ."

"Please don't make a scene, with Elphinstone every half-minute, and Mamma just coming down. I never said we were alone. If you had asked me, I should have told you that Mrs. Eldridge was with us."

“Who’s Mrs. Eldridge?”

“A very nice person, a friend of Marianne Challis. Her husband’s in the Post Office. Madame Louise could dress her to look almost pretty, if her complexion were better. And *propriety*—oh dear!—the very pink! She rather bored me, in fact, because she wouldn’t let it alone.”

“And was this Mrs Ostrich—or whatever her name is—satisfied?”

“Perfectly. She has known Alfred Challis since before his first wife died, and has the most absolute confidence in him.”

“I don’t fancy your Mrs. Ostrich. Where was Mr. Challis’s wife all this time? . . . well!—his deceased wife’s sister, anyhow.”

“Sibyl! I won’t talk to you. Marianne Challis was where we left her, in the stage-box. I don’t suppose she left it, but I didn’t ask her.”

“And then did she and Mrs. Ostrich go home separately?”

“Eldridge. Marianne Challis and she went away together. They were not going home; Wimbledon’s too far, where they are. I really don’t know where they are staying.”

“I’m not curious. But you and Mr. Challis drove home lovingly in a hansom, after acting lovers in a play. There!—you needn’t fly out. . . .”

Was it any wonder that Judith then lost her temper? For she had not flown out. The insinuation that she would do so was based on Sibyl’s knowledge that she would have been perfectly justified in doing so. But now, she did lose her temper, subject to that disguise of self-command which tells for more than any outburst.

“You are taking too much on yourself, Sibyl. Mamma knows. At least, she knows Alfred Challis and his wife. They have dined here, and we agreed—mamma and I—to know nothing about the deceased wife’s sister business. It may even be false from beginning to end. . . . Ask her, did you say? I should never dream of doing so. . . . And as for your other disgraceful—yes! disgraceful—speech just now . . .”

“Well—it’s true! You *had* been, and you know you had.”



“ Had been what ? ”

“ Acting Moorhouse and Aminta Dorrington.”

“ That’s not the way you put it. But I don’t care about that. It’s only your silliness and inexperience makes you say these things. . . . ”

“ What is it you do care about, then ? ”

“ I won’t submit to be catechized, Sibyl. But I’ll tell you. I do care about what the *madre* thinks—and papa. And I shall tell *her*. . . . I wonder who that can be ? ”

The “ that ” in question was a knock at the front door, one that expressed confidence that it was at the right house, and even that it would find some one at home—well-founded confidence in both cases. For the Miss Arkroyds, listening for the identity of the abnormal visitor—at ten o’clock in the morning !—only wait for a barely perceptible instalment of voice and footstep to exclaim jointly : “ The Rector . . . just fancy—what can he want ? . . . In here, Elphinstone ! ” And it may be neither is sorry for the interruption. How very frequently a visitor is the resolution of a family discord ! Judith, pale with suppressed anger, recovers her colour. Sibyl’s flush of excitement dies.

It is the Rector of Royd, no doubt of that ! And something equivalent to a breeze of fresh air, or the tide in an estuary, or the new crackle of a clean pine-wood fire—but not exactly any one of the three—comes into the room with him and his laugh. He has an effect that is usual with him. The under-housemaid, who has passed him on to Mr. Elphinstone, hopes she won’t have done dusting when he comes out. Mr. Elphinstone is seriously hurt at his having breakfasted three hours ago and now refusing food, which would have promoted their intercourse ; and the young ladies are not sorry, on inquiry, to hear that her ladyship is not coming down, but will have her breakfast upstairs, because thereby they will have the Rev. Athelstan all to themselves longer.

However, they chorus sorrow which they don’t feel about their mother ; and affect an equally hypocritical satisfaction at a probable appearance of their father, which they don’t believe in.

“ You’ll see papa will come in presently and say he never heard the bell.” Thus Judith, who shows her pack by

adding: "Now do let's talk and be comfortable till he comes." All right—*nem. con.*!

"I think you the most profligate and dissipated family in London and Westminster. . . . Come nearer the fire? Not if I know it! Both you girls are scorching. . . . Well now! What was it last night?"

"They went to 'Ibsen.'" Judith summarises, abruptly. Sibyl says: "And you went to the Megatherium," rather as a counter-accusation than a contribution of fact. The visitor looks quickly from the one to the other. Whatever he notes, he passes it by.

"I've been to 'Ibsen,'" he says, "and know all about it. The people commit suicide. What was the other play?"

"A stupid thing. I really hardly made out what it was about. But the author's a friend of the people I went with. You remember Mr. Challis, Mr. Taylor? I brought him to tea at the Rectory."

"Of course. I thought him such a shy customer. But I met him after that. We had quite a chat."

"Oh yes—I remember he talked about it to me. I'm afraid you found him a great heathen."

"Absolutely." Mr. Taylor laughs cheerfully over Alfred Challis's heathenism. "But a very good Christian for all that. I shouldn't say so to the Bishop, though. He never came to church, and I wasn't sorry. . . ."

"Do take care, Mr. Taylor. We shall tell the Bishop."

"... Not on his account, you know—on my own. He would have convicted me of plagiarism. I took all his ideas for my sermon."

This was incidental chat, leading to nothing. Then followed inquiry, overdue, about the Rector's establishment, especially his *locum tenens* at Royd, the reporting of whom brought disquiet to his face. His hearers knew he was making the best of it; he was not a good actor. This led naturally to conversation about his own temporary *locus tenendus* in his friend's behalf, and so to the miserable tragedy of the drunkard's death in the canal-lock. Now it was well over four months since either young lady had done any slumming in the Tallack Street quarter: indeed, their visits there soon lost the charm of novelty, so neither recollected its inhabitants off-hand. The descrip-



tion failed to identify, until Mr. Taylor mentioned the unhappy Uncle Bob by name, first heard by him at the inquest. Then a recollection struck Judith.

"That must have been the man that said he was 'mine truly, Robert Steptoe,'" said she. "How very shocking!" The horror of the story of course increased tenfold the moment a *nexus* was established. Reminiscence, at work in Sibyl's mind, caused her to strike in upon Mr. Taylor's continuation of his narrative; on which he arrested it to hear what she was going to say. She said: "Never mind, go on!" till pressed to take her turn first; then said: "Wasn't that the blind beggar and the little girl—the same family, I mean?"

"Exactly. I was just coming to them." And then the Rev. Athelstan proceeded with a full account of poor Jim's sad plight in the Hospital, and of how the little girl had been a great source of anxiety to Addie Fossett. He contrived to assign the whole of the activities on Lizarann's behalf to that lady; having, indeed, a most happy impersonal faculty of narration, which detailed the facts without his own connection with them.

"They are really the reason of my coming here this morning," said he in conclusion. "I dare say you have both been wondering what it was all about. However, it's that. This poor fellow, Jim Coupland, oughtn't to be allowed to sell matches in the streets. And although he makes a good deal by what is really begging in disguise . . ."

"He makes three times what he would at any trade." Sibyl speaks positively; she always knows things.

"But he's putting it all by for the child." The clergyman justifies Jim, promptly.

"Please go on with what you were saying, Mr. Taylor!" Judith speaks. "'Although he makes a good deal by what is really begging in disguise' . . ."

"He might be dissuaded from it even if the loss of his foot—poor fellow!—should make it more lucrative."

"I don't see how." This is Sibyl, naturally. The Rector makes a mental note that she is always in opposition. Her sister says nothing, and he resumes:

"You remember the story of the *asker*?" Sibyl remembers it with a snap, and "Of course!—go on!"

Judith, more slowly, thinks she remembers, and then—oh yes!—she remembers now. The speaker continues: “You know the child isn’t seven, and doesn’t the least realise about her father. She has been indoctrinated from babyhood with a false idea of some employment he has; he’s as professional to her as the turncock or lamplighter. But he—poor chap!—is most anxious she should never know the truth. Yesterday he consented to not seeing the child for another six weeks—although he’s longing for her, day and night—because he wants to spare her the knowledge of his stump. He’s convinced that a wooden leg will be a great joke between them, and is devising shifts by which it may be concealed from his “little lass,” as he calls her, that it is ever taken off. And yesterday, after swearing me, as it were, into the conspiracy for the child’s deception, he ended up with an earnest request that I would never ‘let on’ about his being a ‘cadging varmint.’ I pointed out to him the utter uselessness of the attempt, and that it must fail in the end, and that the longer the knowledge is put off, the more painful it will be when it comes. I suspect he would give it up, to spare her. But he would have to be provided for, somehow.”

“Have to be!” Sibyl’s tone suggests impatient protest against Jim’s case being made a claim on Society. The whole duty of a Christian includes a liberal amount of slumming; but it must be distinctly understood to be Christianity, not bald equity. Athelstan Taylor didn’t feel analytical on the subject. He knew he would have “had to” cross the road between Jerusalem and Jericho if he had happened to come up before the Samaritan, or else that he would have been miserable all night about the man that had fallen among thieves and come to grief. He was like that at school, you see. Such an awfully good-natured chap! Probably Samaria was an awfully good-natured place. Anyhow, he didn’t see his way to discussing the point this morning. He made a concession:

“Well—suppose we say it would be a pleasure to do it! You would feel it so if you knew the child. Really that infant’s pluck when that poor madman was flourishing that horrible knife about . . .”

“But you didn’t tell us about that.” Both ladies speak.



Indeed, Mr. Taylor has slurred over a great deal of his adventure, merely saying he was passing the house and had given what assistance he could, with very little detail till he got to Uncle Bob's escape.

"I never saw such a courageous child in my life. Addie Fossett's got her at the Schoolhouse now. She got a bad chill that night, and we've been very uneasy about her. Perhaps we are both of us given to fidgetting about coughs and temperatures and things. However!" This isolated word expresses, as briefly as possible, dismissal of the subject as material for depression, with retention of it as stimulus to action.

Judith is only languidly interested. "What do you think of doing, Mr. Taylor?" she says absently. Her mind is on the playhouse, yesterday.

"I'm not very clear about details, but if Jim will be tractable, and do as he's told, there ought to be some arrangement possible. He admits that he has some money in the savings-bank, and the Carriers' Co. that ran over him . . . yes!—I've seen the manager . . . are inclined to be liberal in the matter of compensation; and then there's . . ." Here a hesitation comes in.

"There's papa, of course." Both ladies agree about their parent, as a sort of *fons et origo nummorum*. Mr. Taylor had better talk to him about it. Mr. Elphinstone, after thirty-five years in the family, has no scruple about showing that he overhears conversation, and subinforms Miss Arkroyd that Sir Murgatroyd is imminent. Pending the baronet, the conversation is general, then drifts towards the Great Idea. Sibyl becomes gracious—points with pride to a mountain of letters on the subject that she will have to answer before she goes out. Mr Elphinstone has restricted them to a clear spot on the breakfast-table, without presuming to fold or envelope. Miss Arkroyd detracts from their glory. Most of them are from artists who want to make designs for the cripples to execute, or from cripples who can do nothing at present, but would take three-and-sixpence a week during apprenticeship. Sibyl is indignant. The letters are the *exact contrary* of what Judith alleges. It is easy to sneer, but read what Mr. Brewdover says. There's his letter! But Judith says

she isn't prepared to take up her parable on the subject—doesn't know enough about the matter. No doubt it's all right! She withdraws an incipient yawn, and Sibyl says something *sotto voce*, possibly that Judith might just as well have held her tongue.

Athelstan Taylor, writing of this interview to his friend Gus later, said: "I was glad at this point that the Bart. came in, apologetic—as I didn't fancy having to make peace between those two girls. Why need well-brought-up young women to be so quarrelsome—without the excuse of Alcoholism? They are rather a disappointment—those two—they used to be so nice as kids. I must say the old boy is my favourite of the family still—he was quite exemplary about this poor sailor chap—said, if *I* was convinced, that was enough for him, and I had only to say how much would be wanted. Her ladyship was very good too—do her justice!—promised to come and see poor Jim at the Hospital; and I think will keep her promise." He added a postscript next day: "Lady Arkroyd's visit came off this morning, and passed off without ructions. I was rather nervous, because her ladyship thinks it her duty to get up a sort of theologico-ethico-moral-goody steam *because I'm there*—and poor Jim is such a terrible and appalling example of theoretical irreligion that I was on tenterhooks."



## CHAPTER XVII

THE reference to Jim's irreligious attitude, in the Rector's letter, makes it almost incumbent on the story to give some particulars of Lady Arkroyd's visit to the Hospital.

Athelstan Taylor, of course, came to his appointment to the minute. He always preferred to do the waiting himself if he could spare the time, and he usually found something to avert tedium. On this occasion, seeing no sign, when he arrived at St. Brides, of the Arkroyd pair of bays, or the dark chestnuts with starred foreheads—both well known to him—he made short excursions into the neighbourhood, hoping each time to just catch Lady Arkroyd on her arrival when he returned.

He made three such excursions, amounting in all to half an hour. The first and longest was made so by his lighting on a fight between two small boys, which he felt bound to interrupt. But not at the very earliest ; it was such a good fight, and the two pugilists and their friends were enjoying it so. So he spun out his approach as much as possible, and then pounced with, " Why aren't you two at school, hey ?" They looked at each other, and at him, as their friends did also, but could not agree on a reason. Then they said, " Let's go down the lyne," and fled, carrying jackets, to begin again as soon as possible. Pursuit down the lane did not seem to come into practical politics.

The second excursion was shorter, and he was sorry he could not spare time for more conversation with a purveyor of tortoises, who was offering them to the public from a truck. Why should the trade in tortoises flourish in South London ? Why tortoises at all ? He could not stop to learn ; and when he found that her ladyship was still in arrear, he started back to find the tortoise-monger, but failed to do so. On his return this time, he thought it best to step into the Hospital and get a few words with his

friend the House Surgeon, to whom he had sent a card overnight. It was all right, said that gentleman, about the dressers. They had nearly done by now, and Jim's case had been made a point of—was quite ready for visitors; nothing doing now till the visiting surgeon came—in an hour and a half about. Mr. Taylor, reassured, went out again to meet her ladyship, and presently saw the carriage coming down the street. In a very short time he was telling Jim he had brought a lady to see him.

"It's mighty kind of you, master. And it's mighty kind o' the lady. I'm not so fit to see company as I might be." He did not mean he could not see; for he always forgot his blindness. He referred entirely to his uncourtly *entourage*.

"We mustn't trouble about that," said her ladyship, and really didn't mean to be condescending. "I shall sit here, Mr. Taylor. Where will you come?" *Here* being the chair beside the bed. Mr. Taylor wouldn't sit down; indeed, it was easier to stand, as long as Jim kept his hand, which he did not seem inclined to let go.

"Tell this lady about your accident, Jim."

"Oh, do, please! I should so like to hear." This was true, and opened up an avenue of respite to a feeling of her ladyship's that she ought to say something good, if it was only about how we should bow to the will of an All-wise Providence. She had got that ready in the carriage coming through Old Bond Street, and had felt quite sure she should think of something better presently, and hadn't succeeded. So she was glad of a pause, to think in. Besides, it was interesting.

"There's none so much to tell about it, lady; you might put it all inside of a minute, in the manner o' speaking. Ye see, I never see this van coming along—never took note, I should say!—more by token I was listening like to hear the voice of my little lass call 'Pilot'—a kind of divarsion we make out between us, me and the lassie... you'll understand?..."

"I quite understand. Your little lass is the child I have seen at Miss Fossett's Schoolroom. Little Eliza Ann."

"Belike you have, lady. She's Lizarann, sure! Well, this here van come along in the dark, and there was I mazed



like, by reason of not finding the granite curb. It come with a nasty rush, and I had no way on me to steer clear, set apart the want of sea-room. But I'm a bit uncertain how it come about, there's the truth of it!" Jim paused, and felt for an expression, probably one akin to loss of presence of mind; then ended with, "In a quick turn about o' things, you don't easy come by the time to get your considerin' cap on. But it was no fault of any man, as I see it."

Lady Arkroyd saw an opportunity. "It was the will of Providence," she said. There could be no harm in that, although her clerical friend had cautioned her that Jim's mind was not an easy one to deal with on religious lines. But Jews, Turks, Heretics, and Infidels innumerable could have subscribed to this, surely. Jim only said, with the most perfect simplicity: "I wouldn't wish to fix the blame, with any confidence. It was just a chance, as I see it." Her ladyship did not catch the exact tenour of the remark, and did not see the amused, benevolent smile on the face of the big man who still stood looking down on Jim, holding his hand as he would have held a child's.

The fact was that, on one of the two or three occasions when the Rev. Athelstan had referred—but quite colloquially, and without any idea of taking a mean advantage of Jim's helplessness—to the Almighty as the responsible agent in the matter, Jim had taken up the theological position that if God hadn't "cut in," he—Jim—might have been still the strong seaman on the great free sea, might have actually *seen* his little lass! Dolly must have died, of course—"my wife, seven year ago, master," said Jim. "Because a many on us may die, any time"—but that was another matter. At least, why need both his eyes go? "Ah, master!" said he, when it was settled that if God had done one job, he'd done the other, "why couldn't he leave me just no more than a quarter-allowance of one of them—just for to see my wife and the little lass together, what time there was for it?" Perhaps it was part of the Rector of Royd's unsoundness that he almost lost sight of Jim's anthropomorphism—the naïveté of his presentment of his Maker as a meddlesome old plague—in the heart-broken voice that could still speak about the eyes that

could no longer see, about the child his touch and hearing alone could tell him of. Part of that unsoundness, too, maybe, that he resolved thenceforward to make no attempt to change Jim's views, except by hypnotic suggestions, or their equivalent! No crop could grow on land so foully manured! Better to leave it to the wild-flowers for a season.

He certainly thought he saw an improvement of Jim's feelings towards this strange deity of his conception, in this readiness to exonerate him, or it, and to lay the blame on the metaphysico-religious scapegoat, Chance. It was manifested in the tone of his voice, one of willingness to spare even an author of mischief—maybe a well-intentioned blunderer—and to find an insensitive back to flagellate in his place.

"The merest chance, I am sure!" Lady Arkroyd welcomed the scapegoat, and the Rev. Athelstan looked more amused than ever, under the skin. The lady never suspected herself of any absurdity. "But Sir Murgatroyd says the matter ought to be gone into, and proper inquiries made." The Baronet had done so, certainly; but may be said to have been left speaking, like M.P.'s when a reporter packs off an instalment of shorthand *in mediis rebus*. "Of course, if there was any doubt about the driver of the van being sober at the time..."

Jim showed anxiety on the carman's behalf. "He mightn't be any the worse driver for that, Lady," he said. "It was the sart o' night a pint or so don't go far on, to keep the life in a man."

"Jim won't grudge him that much, on such a night, Lady Arkroyd. But Sir Murgatroyd's quite right, of course! However, as a matter of fact, the whole thing has been thoroughly sifted, and it seems certain drink had nothing to do with it, this time."

"Not likely, master! Didn't the pore feller make a shift to get over here a'ter work hours—took a night-turn all the way from Camden Road goods station—so they told me—just for to hear the end of the story? And the follerin' night? So they *said*, and I'm tellin' ye all I know. In coorse, I never seen him, myself!"

"No—of course you could not." Lady Arkroyd's pity



for Jim's blindness, which *his* speech ignored, is mistaken by him for regret at the stringency of visiting regulations. The feeling of compassion in her voice seems to him only man's natural resentment against rules, interpreted by womanly sensibility.

"I'll see him one o' these days, Lady," Jim says consolatorily. Of course, he means in the days of the wooden leg to come, it not sooner. Her ladyship, still conscious of the desirability of a religious atmosphere, has some vague impression that Mr. Taylor has been guaranteeing Jim eyesight on a cloud, through the whole of an exasperating Sunday lasting for ever; and she makes up her mind Jim could be read to out of the Bible with advantage, and of course there were any number of people ready to do this sort of thing. She will inquire about that. But Jim had really wanted to change the conversation to a subject nearer his heart.

"My little lass, Lady!" he said. "You seen the lass once, round to the Schoolhouse. Happen you might see her again?"

"If I see Miss Fossett, Coupland, I shall certainly ask her to point out your little girl. She may not be there, you know."

"That's so, lady. But supposin'! Any guess thing you might speak about, ye know. So I was just thinkin', if you was to be so very kind as to bear in mind..."

"Yes. Indeed I will, Coupland. Is there something you wish I should say?"

"Well, lady, yes! And be very thankful to ye! Would ye be so very kind as just say to her... from her Daddy, ye know... nothing at all about any sort of an ill-convenience come of this here accident. Just make it easy, like... for she's but young, ye'll understand..."

"Jim means... I know, Jim"—for Jim seemed about to interrupt the Rev. Athelstan—"he means he wants Lizarann to think the accident a slight one."

"Right you are, master!" Jim is much relieved, and his interpreter continues: "So he wants her to know as little as possible till he can walk about and make the least of it."

"Oh yes! I quite understand that. I'll be very careful and discreet."

“Not for to let on, anyways, about her Daddy being a fut the less !” Jim’s relief is enormous at the completeness of the understanding.

The conversation ran on, on such general lines as the diet of hospital life—highly approved of—the sanguineness of the head-surgeon that Jim would make a record in recovery, and the peculiarly small amount of inconvenience endured (if the truth were known) by the wearers of wooden legs. Jim was very cheerful about this. “Bob Steptoe, he’ll lose a good half o’ my custom,” said he, immensely amused.

At this moment an interruption occurred. A nurse who had passed through the room a few minutes before rather hurriedly was returning, with a slightly perplexed manner on her, as of one who had not found a thing sought for. At the same moment another, who seemed a superior functionary, came in from the opposite door, and they met and spoke together in an undertone. Both looked round towards Jim’s bed.

“I can ask him, anyhow !” said the senior nurse, and approached Athelstan Taylor. She spoke to him rapidly under her breath, but of what she said neither Jim nor the lady heard anything. When she had finished, he said, “Of course, certainly !” and then, turning to Lady Arkroyd, explained that a man who was dying in another part of the Hospital had asked to see a clergyman, and that an unusual conjunction of circumstances had made it difficult to comply with his request, which was urgent. He might die any moment, the nurse had said, and Mr. \* \* \* was ill—he being, presumably, the usual resource in such cases. Mr. Taylor was sure Lady Arkroyd would excuse him. But it would be better for him to say good-bye provisionally, as no one could tell how long he might be detained. Her ladyship would no doubt stay and talk with Jim a little longer.

Lady Arkroyd was not sorry to do so. She had not quite come up to her own standard of self-justification ; having, indeed, a well-marked conviction of her capability of doing anything she turned her hands to, and certainly not least of affording consolation and help to the distressed. Without cataloguing the instances, she had an inner conviction



of the existence of a class of persons who were sick, and she visited them. She was a good-natured woman enough, and really took sufficient pleasure in doing good on purpose, to make playing at Providence a luxury, or at least to prevent its ever becoming a bore. No wonder that on this occasion she felt a little damped, with nothing further to her score so far than an undertaking on her part to hold her tongue and be discreet, under specified circumstances.

“The master’s coming back—the gentleman?” says Jim, as the door closes on Mr. Taylor and the nurse.

“Oh yes!—he’ll come back to see you before he goes.” Jim has to be satisfied with this. “You must try to keep quiet and be patient, Coupland, and then the healing will go on quicker. . . .”

“It ain’t hardly impatience, Lady.” Jim pauses to think what it is. “Not so much as the want of a good stretch. I’d be all right if they’d take this here plaister off o’ my right leg. It’s a mighty thick plaister, anyhow. Jim’s slight movement is terribly expressive of the irksomeness of his lot. The nurse in charge notes the fact, and contrives such alleviation as may be—an alteration in the angle of the couch, an adjustment of a pillow, a dose of some refreshing stimulant that seems not unwelcome. “He’s not the trouble many are,” says she. Jim seems a favourite.

Lady Arkroyd, left to herself, casts about for something to say which shall neither be aggressively religious nor too cowardly a concession to Jim’s heathenism, of which Mr. Taylor has spoken freely to her. After a few more words about collateral matter, especially about the Hospital’s veto on smoking—a bitter privation—she thinks she sees her way.

“It is very hard, Coupland, and one can’t help saying so. Only, of course, it doesn’t do to call the Wisdom of Providence in question. . . .”

“What might that be, missis—lady, I should say?” Now the fact is, Jim was not inquiring about the Wisdom of Providence—of which he had heard before from Mr. Wilkins—but about the meaning of “calling in question.” The lady thought otherwise, mistakenly.

“I only meant,” she said, feeling very unsafe, “that we

know—at least, *we* believe—that events are Divinely ordered for the best.”

“Ye know better than I do about that, lady,” said Jim. And then Lady Arkroyd thought he was an Agnostic. He had really only paid tribute to her superior education. But it seemed to set him a-thinking, too! For he added, after a pause: “If they’d a’ been ordered for the worst, maybe I might have had my barker-pipe.” The word “Divinely” had not carried his mind outside the Hospital regulations. Poor Jim had not the remotest conception that he had shocked his lady visitor.

Nevertheless, she was shocked, and felt the case called for an effort. But her own religious convictions—only she had been quite properly educated, mind you!—were few and vapid. Her proprietorship of a Prayer-Book, with a mark in the right place, nearly covered the whole ground. However, there was always the Rev. Athelstan; she could make him responsible, by indirect engineering, for any amount of belief, whatever her own unprofessional laxity might be. So she assumed a definitely religious air, and ignored Jim’s unfortunate remark about the pipe.

“I feel so sure, Coupland, that Mr. Taylor has told you, and will tell you more, about Where to look, in tribulation, for . . .”

“Sakes alive, Lady! *Me* look! . . .” Jim, who had interrupted, stopped suddenly, confused and perturbed at something. Her ladyship, interpreting this as some protest of Agnosticism, now felt her insufficiency to deal with the case, and only wished to transfer the conversation elsewhere. She felt she had done her duty, in what she would not have hesitated to mention in Society as “goody talk,” when she executed that superb *entrechat*, so to speak, of the big initial W of “Where.” She had done her duty, and had not succeeded. She would be quite justified now in relaxing from the exalted serenity, tempered with due humility, of a spiritual instructress, and referring to the minor consolations of this earth. She ignored Jim’s exclamation, and continued speaking as though her last sentence had been completed.

“Besides, in a very little while you will be able to have Eliza Ann back again, and really you’ll be able to move about quite easily.”



Jim laughed out—a big hearty laugh of contempt for any mere personal mishap of his own. “I’ll have the less weight to carry, sure!” he said. And then her ladyship looked at her watch, and asked the nurse whether that clock was right; who promptly replied that that clock was, if anything, slow. Seeing the good effect of which, she went on to say that it was slower still. However, this was not needed, for the visitor was only feeling about for departure, which, in view of the possible indefinite postponement of Mr. Taylor’s return, was given up with insincere professions of regret on the part of both, and Lady Arkroyd took her leave, consolable, but with a noble sense of duty done.

“The master *be* coming back, though, missis . . . ?” Jim asks anxiously of the nurse.

“Oh yes, he’s bound to come back, and you may make your mind easy.”

When Athelstan Taylor and the nurse left the ward, they passed through the avenue of beds in the adjoining ward without speaking, and into a lobby beyond. Then the nurse stopped and spoke. “This is a bad ward that we are going to. Perhaps I ought to have told you?”

“You are going there yourself?”

“It is my duty to go.”

“And mine.” They said no more, but no more was necessary. It was a little way further that they had to go, through wards and passages; but the circumstances did not seem to favour chat. Arriving at the door of the ward, Mr. Taylor turned and said: “This is a man, is it not—this patient—I think you said?”

“A man. The case developed in the hospital. He was brought in as sudden paralysis. He has been here a month or more.”

“Do they keep cases of this sort so long?”

“Not always. They kept this one. He had an epileptic seizure which was followed by torpor. Dr. ——— thinks now that the disease has affected the valves of the heart. He might die suddenly, at any moment. When I told him so to-day, he asked to see the Chaplain, Mr. ———. He and all his family have mumps.”

A young doctor was in the ward, who said, "Is this the gentleman?" and after "Yes" from the nurse, continued: "You mustn't be alarmed at our precautions. We only take them in order to be on the safe side." The precautions which, it seemed, St. Bride insisted on for all who should enter a contagion-ward were a close overall of some germ-proof canvas or linen, and thin, invulnerable rubber gloves. Mr. Taylor, as he drew them on, shuddered to think how many a time, conceivably, they might have been some wearer's only safeguard against a blasted life, and the inheritance of a dire poison by generations yet unborn.

When he was safely attired in them, the young surgeon, as he conducted him through the ward, said in reply to a question: "Oh no!—not the slightest *danger* from the breath. You may be quite happy about that. Let Sister Martha put a little eau-de-Cologne on your handkerchief. This is your man."

This! This semi-mummy that is little else than bandages! This thing, at least, only manifested to us, otherwise, as an exposed mouth; or what was a mouth and is an orifice, to be identified by two carious, projecting teeth; or as the nailless fingers of an enclosed hand, escaping from its wraps. This, it seems, is the Rev. Athelstan Taylor's man, by whom he takes a chair the nurse brings him, as he thinks to himself: "My man, thank God, not Gus's!" For his invalid friend might easily have been here in his place, and could *he*—poor delicate fellow!—have borne the awful flavour of this place, breaking through all antiseptic spray and palliation of ozone, and making him, himself, as physically sick as he is sick at heart? "Not Gus's man, thank God! At least, a great overgrown giant like myself!" So he thought as he tried to catch the words of the wretched remnant on the bed beside him. They were audible only by him, as he stooped resolutely, brushing all caution aside, and placed his ear close to the dreadful mouth. It needed an effort, even with Sister Martha's benediction on his handkerchief.

"What is my name, and who am I?" He repeats the whispered words as he hears them. "I am Athelstan Taylor, a priest in holy orders. . . . Yes—a clergyman of the Church of England . . . yes!—I understand what you



say. You have something on your conscience which you wish to tell. Try and tell me."

The nurse evidently thinks the man is dying, and may die without receiving the Sacrament, which she has supposed his principal object. She makes a suggestion to that effect. But Mr. Taylor thinks otherwise. "Presently!" he says. "Let him tell his story first." The nurse retires, and the tale goes on.

It was a hard tale to catch the threads of. But its hearer was able to master the main points. The narrator had married, sixteen years before, a very young and inexperienced girl, unknown to her parents, who seemed to have remained in ignorance throughout. Even when he deserted her, a very short time after marriage, she kept her secret from everyone but a young clerk, a friend of his own, with whom, as a natural consequence, the poor girl, apparently afraid to divulge the facts to her family, became very *liée*. His story was obscure at this point, the only clear thing being that, in order to shake her off and remain free to contract another marriage, he had written a mock confession to this young man; alleging, on grounds which the dying man's condition prevented his explaining in full, that the wedding had been really a fraud, and his statement that it was so seemed to have been held sufficient by the girl. The friend, either convinced of its truth or in love with the girl himself, had accepted it, or seemed to accept it, as indisputable. Was it to be wondered at that, when she returned to her home after an absence of some months, with nothing to show that this concealed marriage had taken place, she had accepted this young man as her lover, and married him with the full consent of her parents? The narrator had clearly foreseen this, and looked to it as a practical release from an encumbrance. His own subsequent career had been one of profligacy and crime, some of his sins being, to all appearance, far worse than this one, as such things are estimated; one achievement having, in fact, procured him a long term of penal servitude. How strange it seemed that now, with the hand of Death upon him, he should feel the lighter offence an exceptional weight upon his conscience! Yet so it was! And his hearer thought he could detect the relief the confession had given him in

the changed whisper that followed the completion of his story. Mr. Taylor was glad that the atrocity that sent him to Portland Island was not specially referred to in the culprit's final inquiry—could he hope for forgiveness?

“I told the unhappy creature,” wrote Athelstan to Gus, in the letter he wrote that evening, “that his chances of forgiveness must depend on the truth or falsehood of his own contrition, and I am afraid I had the cruelty to say it with some severity. You know my severe manner. But, then, it was true. I'm afraid, Gus dear, that I have hardly your faith in the efficacy of my holy office, taken by itself. But these things are awful to face. I had hardly time to fulfil my function as a priest when the poor wretch breathed his last.”

It was at that last moment that the need of the rubber gloves became manifest. Just at the end, the dreadful nail-less hand, moving painfully about, and fraught with some sudden strength, had caught the healthy one that lay near it on the coverlid, and drew it up to touch it with the things that had once been lips. The young doctor seemed relieved when he had himself seen the priest in holy orders well drenched in water with strange suspicions of sanitation in it, after a heart-felt lather of carbolic soap.

When the Rev. Athelstan came back to Jim's bedside, his face no longer wore its cheerful aspect of an hour ago. In that short time his sad experience—surely something more than a mere death-bed, such as his daily routine of life brought him to the sight of so often!—had changed it, and made him almost like another man.

“I'm martal glad ye've come, master,” said Jim. And, at the sound of a voice with a memory in it of the chant the windlass echoes when the anchor leaves its bed in the sand, and the last shore-boat waves God-speed to the ship set free, his hearer seemed to shake off some of the gloom that oppressed him. “I'm martal glad to see ye back,” he repeats, “by token of the good lady.”

Athelstan takes the hand that seeks his. “Why the good lady, Jim?” he says.

“Why, master, the good lady she says to me, she says,



did I know where to look for soomat or other ? Lard knows what ! And I says to her, ‘ *Me* look ! ’ I says, because I was thinking belike this drawback on my eyesight might have slipped out of memory. . . . ”

“ Not very likely, Jim ! But if it did, Lady Arkroyd’s recollected it by now. ”

“ Ye think so, master ? But put it she hasn’t ! I’d be sorry she should come to the knowledge late in the day. These here ladies, master, they ain’t a rough sart, like we ” —this did not mean his hearer, only himself and his congeners—“ and she might easy get tender-hearted what with thinkin’ over. And *I’d* never be the worse, bless you ! ”

“ *I* see what you mean, Jim. ” The light dawns ; the speaker had been till then in the dark. He has a laugh ready for it, as he adds : “ You thought the lady would be unhappy when she found she’d been talking to a blind man about his eyesight ? Wasn’t that it ? ” That was it, clearly. But Jim discerns a justification for his idea, when he learns that his blindness had been fully talked over.

“ There’s just what I said, in that, ye see ! ” says he. “ The lady wouldn’t be talking, not to hurt my feelings ! Jim Coupland’s feelings now ! . . . where are we at that ? ” They seem to be a rare good joke to Jim. But there is material for regret in the background. “ ’Tain’t a matter to cry one’s eyes out over, ” says he, “ but a bit of a pity, too ! . . . ”

“ What is, Jim ? ”

“ If I’d kept a lookout ahead, I could have steered the good lady clear of any fret about me and my eyesight. And if we’d only ’a known, I might ’a told her the starry o’ the Flying Dutchman—just for entertainment like ! A yarn’s a yarn, master ! ”

Athelstan Taylor was puzzled on his way home by the curious selection of a restless conscience as aliment for disquiet. But thinking back on his own past, he found that *his* disquiets had not been about his mistakes that had most harmed others. Could he not remember his own prolonged remorse, at five years old, when an overtwist brought off the wooden leg of a minute doll, and he had

the meanness to put the limb in place, and leave it, sound to all seeming, for its owner to discover its calamity ? And how he *never told* ! Even now, he wished he had confessed. It was no use now ! The sister that doll had belonged to had been dead thirty years, and this tale he had just heard was, so he gathered, well within the last twenty.

He was wondering that evening, after writing to Gus, whether his friend, whose place he was so glad to occupy, would not have raised some technical difficulty about the Administration of the Sacrament in rubber gloves, when a note came from his friend the House Surgeon. Had the man he had talked with given his name ? It appeared that the name entered in the list of patients was an alias. Probably he had several aliases. But he had a right to be buried and registered under his last one. A line by return would do. The letter made very light of the matter—said the deceased couldn't have had any property !

Athelstan Taylor's reply was that the name given, as far as he could hear it, was Edward Kay Thorne. He walked out and posted it himself, as the servants had gone to bed. He posted at the same time his letter to his friend Gus, to which he had added a long postscript about the events of the day. "You need not think," it ended, "that I have broken the 'seal of the confessional' in telling this man's story. He said I was at liberty to do as I liked." He felt rather glad to have a sharer in such a confidence. Then he went back to his comfortable library, put coals on the fire, and sat up till one in the morning reading.



## CHAPTER XVIII

THE dead drunkard's funeral expenses had been made conditional on his widow postponing her visit to the Hospital. No doubt the stress laid by Miss Fossett and her brother's friend on Jim's unfitness to receive visitors, was owing to their desire to justify this. It is fair to say that the woman spent the money honourably on its assigned object. She belonged to a class that expresses its emotions in the presence of Death by the celebration of obsequies, just as much as Kings and Princes—perhaps even more, considering its limitations. The classes that keep funeral ecstasies in check are to be found half-way on the human ladder, somewhere.

The object of using the power thus gained was not so much to conceal the story of the drunkard's death—for it was soon clear that Jim would not be injuriously affected by hearing of that—as to keep from him that Lizarann was the worse for her exposure in the snow on that terrible night. It appeared to Miss Fossett and the Rev. Athelstan—or Yorick, as she always called him and thought of him—that a certain amount of playing double was justified by the circumstances. It might have been a very serious throwback to Jim to know that his little lass was being kept away from him by anything but his own wish to be “on his pins again” next time he saw her; and he held on so stoically to his resolution not to see her till then that it seemed a very diluted mendaciousness to say no more of Lizarann's health than that she had caught a slight cold, and would be much better cared for at the school-house than at her aunt's—unless, indeed, Jim especially wished Mrs. Steptoe to have her back. Jim didn't.

“She's such a nice little girl in herself, Yorick,” said Miss Fossett a fortnight after Lady Arkroyd's visit to the Hospital, “that one wishes it could be managed.” She was referring to a suggestion her ladyship had made.

“Does one, altogether?” was Yorick’s reply. “What was it she said?—‘Get her away from her terrible surroundings, and give her a chance of doing well.’ Our Baronetess is a good-hearted woman in reality—with a little flummery—only she’s apt to be taken in by scounding phrases. This one would either mean taking the little person away from her Daddy, or else getting *him* away from *his* terrible surroundings. Who’s to do it, Addie? You would shirk the task just as much as I, if you knew Jim.”

“But couldn’t he be got away, too?”

“Well!—of course, I was thinking of that as impracticable at the moment.”

“But is it?”

“Why—no! It’s only a question of money. Jim would be ductile enough, I see that. I suppose I should be right in getting Sir Murgatroyd’s money used that way?”

“Certainly. He has twenty thousand a year. What does it matter? One-pound-five a week is fifty-two pounds for the pound, and thirteen pounds for the five shillings—one-fourth part. Sixty-five pounds! Oh, Yorick, what *can* it matter?”

“I don’t know,” says Yorick. He is one of those rare people who don’t think misappropriation of funds grows less and less immoral in the inverse ratio of the one borne to them by the source of their supply.

“Well!—I *do*,” says Miss Fossett. “Sir Murgatroyd can perfectly well afford it.”

There was time to discuss the matter, and Yorick and Miss Fossett did so at intervals during the weeks that followed. Discussion of any project favours its materialisation, which often comes about more because it is kept alive than in consequence of any agreement on details among its promoters. The idea that “something would have to be done” about Lizarann and her Daddy took root both in Grosvenor Square and the neighbourhood of Tallack Street, and only waited for Jim’s wooden leg, to become a reality. It was taken for granted that Lizarann’s cough, which was really hardly anything now, would be quite gone by then, and that her pulse would be normal. Six whole weeks!

Meanwhile Lizarann herself was not prepared to admit



there was anything the matter with her. She secretly regarded the whole thing as a conspiracy to keep her away from her Daddy—a conspiracy somehow fostered and encouraged by Dr. Ferris's stethoscope; but not one to be denounced and rebelled against, because of the obviously good intentions of Teacher, the gentleman, and the doctor-gentleman. It wasn't *their* fault! They were misled by that audacious little lying pipe, which was no use either to play upon or look through, and yet had the effrontery to pretend you could listen with it. Absurd!

Other forms of medical investigation she regarded as games, and resolved that when she and her Daddy were back at Aunt Stingy's, she was going to ply them gymes with Bridgetticks. She would listen to Bridgetticks's chest with a hoopstick many a day when the spring came, and weather permitted doorsteps. And *vice versa*; fair play, of course! And she would get her down flat, and put one hand on lots of different places on her chest, and thud it unfairly hard with the other, and say, "Does that hurt you?" and make her draw long breaths. She accepted diagnosis as human and lovable in benefactors, but still a weakness, and a sure road to misapprehension in chest cases.

It if had not been for cod-liver oil, and restraints, and mustard poultices that printed her small chest red, she would have regarded the whole thing as a lark, especially in view of the banquets that accompanied it. And was she not assured that Daddy was having the same, only heaps more? The oil was the worst trial. It pretended to be tasteless certainly, but that was mere pharmaceutical hypocrisy; the bottles knew better, whatever the labels might say. Her first hearing of the name of this nasty *elixir vitæ* produced a curious confusion in her mind, the revelation of which shocked Miss Fossett, taxed Yorick's command of his countenance, and made the doctor chuckle at intervals all the way home. For she recalled an occasion on which the Rev. Wilkinson Wilkins had denounced "ungodly livers." Herein lay great possibilities of misapprehension, and Lizarann was not slow to infer that cod-liver oil was divine, as opposed to some still worse abomination on draught in the opposite camp—devil-liver oil, perhaps!

The foregoing shows to what an extent Teacher had turned her residence next door to the School into a hospital for the accommodation of this case. The good-natured lady was always liable to get involved in the fortunes of any of her young students, and though the present one had no claim on her that a hundred others might not have had, she was no doubt a lovable child, and her courage under trial had fairly engaged the affections of the Rev. Athelstan. Now Yorick had always been an idol of Adeline Fossett's from the day when he was first introduced to her, a girl his junior in years, but older than he for all that, as an Eton friend to whom her favourite brother probably owed his life. She had been much in his confidence in the years that followed ; had been his great friend and adviser all through his Oxford days ; had sympathized with him in all his youthful love-affairs. Why it was invariably taken for granted that he and she were always to beat up different covers for a lifelong mate it would have been difficult to say. But so it was, and so it continued, quite to the seeming satisfaction of both. She remained his confidante during all the hesitations and perplexities of his courtship of Sophia Caldecott, while only giving a qualified approval to his choice ; and when he departed, beaming, with that young lady on a wedding-tour, she honestly believed that her own burst of tears as soon as she found herself, after the day's excitement, alone with her sense that the world had got empty and chill, was due to the fact that Yorick had married, as she viewed the matter, the wrong sister—Sophia instead of Elizabeth, her great friend. Sophia was the pretty one, of course ! But men were blind !

Adeline's life was so interwoven with that of a brother who, she believed, would certainly never marry that she looked on herself as not entered for the race of life at all. The idea held her with such force that she could build castles in the air for a bosom friend without a suspicion of a wish for self-election to their suzerainship. Sophia—once fourteen, and nothing—changed into a woman and captured the best castle for herself. Is it certain that Elizabeth's entry into that castle would have left Adeline's world so much less empty and chill ? Who can say ? All there is room to tell here is that Sophia's death came in a few years ;



and that Adeline's contemplation of Elizabeth's instalment as Queen Regent, without rights of coronation, was productive of involutions of thought and feeling that would have baffled Robert Browning. She was glad to believe she believed her secret grief that Yorick and Elizabeth could never be man and wife genuine. Perhaps it was.

Very likely the readiness of Miss Fossett to harbour and cherish Lizarann does not want such an elaborate explanation. Lizarann, as the story has shown, was far from being an unattractive scrap in herself, although the mouth *was* too large for beauty—no doubt of it! She was especially so in these well-washed days when Miss Fossett went after her own very early breakfast to wake her in the morning; or, if awake, to prevent her trying to get up before Dr. Ferris came.

“Maten't I go to see Daddy to-day, Teacher?” she said—always the first question—one such morning about a month after her appropriation by Miss Fossett.

“*Maten't* you—funny child! *Mayn't* you's what you mean. No, dear, you mayn't—not yet! Not till Dr. Ferris says yes. You must be a good little girl and have patience.” For Miss Fossett knew children too well to weep with them invariably in their troubles. Here was one that would bear a bracing treatment. Its effect this time was that a sob never came to maturity—was resolutely swallowed—and that the career of a couple of tears was nipped in the bud by a nightgown-sleeve. A sniff made a protest in their favour, but cut a poor figure. Courage had the best of it.

“Mustn't I only send a kiss to Daddy, Teacher?” Lizarann says this very ruefully.

“Teacer!” Miss Fossett mimics her pronunciation. “Of course you may, dear, as many as you like! You give them to me, and *I'll* see that Daddy gets them.” This is very rash, as Lizarann springs like a tiger, and discharges a volley that would have kept a game of kiss-in-the-ring going for a fortnight. An evil, you will say, easily endurable by a childless woman, with perhaps a hungry heart! Agreed. But embarrassing complications followed. As soon as Lizarann, who was evidently going to be much better to-day, had disposed of a very respectable breakfast for an invalid, and was brought into good form to receive the

doctor—she was very nice when she smelt of soap, was Lizarann—her mind harked back on the kissing transaction.

“Who shall you give the skisses to, to tike to Daddy?”

“Never you mind! Daddy shall get them, and that’s enough for any little girl at this time in the morning. Now lie still and be good. There’s Dr. Ferris’s knock.”

Lizarann complied. But curiosity rankled. Would Miss Fossett entrust those kisses to Dr. Ferris to give to Daddy? That was the substance of the question that came in perfect good faith from the pillow Lizarann was lying still and being good on. And this with Dr. Ferris audible below!

“Most certainly *not*! I don’t know him well enough.” This was very decisive; and Lizarann’s impersonal mind discerned in it a mistrust of the goods reaching their destination. Dr. Ferris might give them to some one else. Another carrier must be found.

“But you do the gentleman?”

“Yes, of course! I could give them to the gentleman. But we’ll do better than that, Lizarann. I’ll give them back to you, and you’ll give them to the gentleman.” An arrangement that pleases Lizarann, whose allegation that there was siskteen, makes the refund a long job. It lasts till the doctor knocks at the room door.

“Who were you talking to, Doctor?” Lizarann’s tickle is still on the speaker’s face, as she smooths matters—hair and such-like.

“It’s the aunt, Widow Steptoe. . . .”

“Do take care, Doctor!”

“Oh—I forgot! It’s all right, I think, though . . . she wants a testimonial, to say she can cook. She can’t, of course! How’s the patient?”

“Look and see! I suppose I must see Mrs. Steptoe. She wants to talk, you know. I could just as easily write to this Mrs. What’s-her-name . . . oh yes! I know who it’s for . . . as have a long talkee-talkee. If she keeps me, come in as you go, to tell me.”

There is a twofold advantage in the loss of a husband who is a curse to your existence—who is bone of your bone



and flesh of your flesh, with all the disadvantages of a community of goods, such as was endured by Zohak the tyrant, who shared his with two serpents that had grown out of him, and partook of him at intervals. One gain is, that your husband is now no more—as the vernacular puts it when not claiming various forms of hereafters for the departed; the other, that we may now mourn his loss and ascribe beauties of character to him without fear of his coming to life to give them practical disclaimers. We can do it with crape, and if we can't afford a pair of black kids, Lisle thread lastis a long time, if wore careful; indeed, Mrs. Hacker, whose testimony we are quoting, was able to dwell on the cheapness of job-lots in the article of mourning, and the advantages we enjoy from sales—advantages unknown to Zohak in his day; only perhaps his snakes outlived him. If they did, there can have been no false note in the pathos with which they spoke of him as “now no more.”

Mrs. Steptoe, having been so liberally assisted towards funeral expenses, had been able to enjoy herself thoroughly over the millinery department. Even Bridgetticks had been impressed by the respectability of her appearance. Tallack Street felt it, and joined in tributes to the moral qualities of Mr. Steptoe. It did not shut its eyes to his failing, but rather utilised it to the advantage of his memory, sketching an exalted character that he would certainly have possessed if it had not been undermined by his unfortunate propensity. Each male inhabitant of Tallack Street could conscientiously call upon all his neighbours to bear witness to the many times he had dwelt on what a good, honest, generous, trustworthy nature underlay this unfortunate proclivity to drinking spirits continually, during waking hours, whenever he had a thrup'ny bit left, or could get credit, or stood treat to. All agreed to regard it as a sort of involuntary habit, like blinking; or at worst a flaw in culture—like eating peas, or the butter, with the blade of your knife. “The man he was, be'ind it all!”—that was what Tallack Street looked at. The Philosopher might, if Time permitted, have exclaimed: “*De non apparentibus et non existentibus eadem est ratio!*” Tallack Street would have replied, forcibly as we think, that it

warn't messin' about with any blooming reasonings—only turning of it over like.

But we doubt if Tallack Street would have recognised Uncle Bob's virtues so readily if his widow's grief had been less effectively shown.

Her mourning gownd was that respectable to look at you couldn't 'ardly tell her for Mrs. Steptoe, goin' along the street, or in at the butcher's. Whereat Tallack Street shook its heads, and accepted the past as a lesson for the future, its older ones saying to its younger ones: "Pore Bob! What did I tell you, N. or M., concernin' of small goes of gin took at all hours and no sort o' system?" The tone of melancholy forgiving retrospect being entirely a reaction produced by the correct attire of the widow.

The same influence made Miss Fossett believe, for the moment, that Mrs. Steptoe *could* cook, for all Dr. Ferris said. She wrote a testimonial for her which suggested that behind the good plain-cooking accomplishment, as scheduled, were unexplored possibilities this candidate for a place would not lay claim to, from modesty. But for the applicant's decent gown and gloves and new umbrella, she would have thought nothing of her account of her cooking powers, as shown many years since in the early days of her marriage, in certain apartments at Ramsgate, where her husband then worked, before they came to London. She had then cooked a dinner for ten persons, with *entrées* and sweets. Miss Fossett hesitated, metaphorically, to swallow this dinner—tried to persuade Mrs. Steptoe to reduce it to eight. That good woman, however, on taxing her memory, rather showed a disposition to increase it to twelve. On which Miss Fossett surrendered at discretion.

"Of course you'll soon get your hand back again, Mrs. Steptoe; and I hope you'll get this place." At this point the character was written, with a full certificate of the circumstances. It seemed worded to convey that a female *cordón bleu*, who had been seeing better days, had been forced by ill-hap to resume her old *rôle* of life. Completing it, Miss Fossett again spoke: "Where did you say you were in service, Mrs. Steptoe? Ramsgate?"

"Not exactly in service, miss."



“What, then?”

“In apartments to let.” Mrs. Steptoe seemed a little uncertain; like a respectable person telling fibs, and in a difficulty. Then she saw her way, and went on, relieved. “I was requested to it, as a favour. Owing to landlady indisposed—having known her from early childhood.” She was proud of this expression evidently. “By the name of Cantrip. I was left in charge, and give every satisfaction. Thirty-two, Sea View Terrace, on the cliff.”

“And the lodgers had ten people at dinner!” Miss Fossett was surprised, and showed it. The image her mind formed of thirty-two, Sea View Terrace, did not jump with a dinner of ten persons, with *entrées* and sweets. But was it reasonable in not doing so? Mrs. Steptoe must have appreciated the difficulty, for she threw in, “Did you know the house, miss?” and the question was skilful. Miss Fossett admitted that she did not. “But I certainly thought it seemed a large party for a lodging-house,” said she, feeling apologetic. She did not wish to be unjust, even to a lodging-house.

Mrs. Steptoe was all amazement that the extensive accommodation of Sea View Terrace should be unknown anywhere in Europe. Her desire to express it seemed to expand beyond dictionaries. Her sakes—why, a many more could have sat down! She then went on to substantiate her statement, giving the names of the guests: “There was Mr. and Mrs. Hallock and family was five, staying in the apartments. And Mrs. Bridgman and her daughter was seven. And Mr. and Mrs. Thorne, and Mr. Hollings—no!—Harris, a young gentleman from town. Countin’ up to ten!” Mrs. Steptoe was triumphant. Such detail would verify anything.

“Well!—anyhow, there’s the letter, Mrs. Steptoe, and I hope you’ll get the place and do well.” Miss Fossett was convinced the good woman had been lying, more or less; and so she had, but the only portion of her statement that affects this story was true enough. She had relieved her conscience about the fib that she had cooked this dinner by giving the actual names of those who had eaten it as nearly as she remembered them. Can we not sympathize with her? Are we not human?

She took the letter with abasement and deep gratitude, neither altogether unconnected with a religious fog, unexplained, hanging about the memory of her lamented husband. She inquired after her brother—was looking forward to seeing him on Friday, the next visiting-day at the Hospital—understood he had asked for her to come, with a distinct implication that his nature was a neglectful one, and that she was neglected.

“He has asked for you several times,” said Miss Fossett. “But Mr. Taylor thought—so did I—that it would be best for him to know nothing of your husband’s death till he was stronger. He puts it down to the Hospital regulations—thinks you have not been admitted. Mr. Taylor will tell him all about it before you see him.”

“As you and the gentleman think best, miss! And the little girl, you was a-sayin’, is better?”

“The little girl is a great deal better. Wait a minute, and I’ll ask Dr. Ferris if he thinks you could see her.”

Mrs. Steptoe, who was quite able to keep her anxiety to see her niece in due subordination, dwelt upon her unwillingness to encroach on Miss Fossett’s time. Who, accounting these professions honest—which they weren’t—went away and met the doctor coming down. He had been a long time over his patient, she remarked. “This patient,” said he, “is good company. Glad to say she’s going on capitally. Temperature all but normal.”

“That aunt-woman’s here still.” Miss Fossett drops her voice to say this. “Could I take her up to see her safely, do you think?”

“Can you be sure she won’t talk about her conf . . . about her husband, I mean?”

“Ye-es! I think so, if she promises. I don’t *know*.”

“It can’t do any great harm, in any case. The child is thinking of nothing but Daddy. Five past nine—oh dear! I’m off . . . oh yes!—you may try it.” And off goes the doctor.

As to Lizarann’s interview with her aunt that followed, a few words will be enough. For no story can record everything everywhere closely; it must take and reject. It was, on the part of Aunt Stingy, an unpresumptuous interview, fraught with meek reminders to little girls of what was due



on their part towards their benefactors ; as also with suggestions of the depravities inherent in all their species. An interview mysteriously saturated with a sense of religious precepts refrained from, but conferring a sense or moral superiority in one who could, had she chosen, have become a well-spring and fountain-head of little-girl-crushing platitudes. On Lizarann's part, an interview with a background of indictments against herself undisclosed ; connected, no doubt, somehow with her demeanour on the terrible occasion when she saw her aunt and uncle last. She dared not ask what she had done, preferring to refer her blood-guiltiness—of which, as a general rule, she entertained no doubt—in this case to the lucifer-match negotiation which had induced Uncle Bob to leave hold. That seemed more likely than that she had left the street-door stood on the jar. Of course, she might have been convicted of concealed chestnuts ; or even, by some necromancy, Aunt Stingy might have divined how near she had felt to passing the forbidden Vatted Rum Corner limit. But the lucifer-match theory seemed the most probable—not to be broached, however, without the gentleman himself there to protect her. Teacher was good—angelic, indeed—but she was uninformed. And who could say that the evil plausibilities of a subtle human aunt might not persuade her to turn against her *protégée*, and rend her ? However, the question was not raised, and Lizarann felt grateful when the said aunt departed, after a horny farewell peck.

But as soon as she had departed, Lizarann became suddenly talkative. “Is Aunt Stingy's new gownd pide for ?” said she.

“Inquisitive little monkey !” said Teacher. “Perhaps it is ; perhaps it isn't.”

“What did it costited ?” asked Lizarann. But she was really uninterested about the purchase. She was keeping the question before the House in the hope that the debate would throw a light on a collateral point. “Mrs. Hacker's married daughter Sarah was a widow,” said she, to give the conversation a lift. “She wore her cloze out, *she* did.”

But why had widowhood come suddenly on the tapis ? Evidently sharp ears had heard the doctor's indiscreet

speech. Miss Fossett grasped the position. Lizarann would have to know some time. Why not now ?

“ Poor Aunt Stingy ! ” She spoke with her eye on Lizarann, on the watch for a guess on the child’s part that would assist disclosure. She saw in the large puzzled orbs that met hers, and the small hands pulling nervously at the sheet, that the idea she wanted was either dawning or fructifying. She continued : “ Aunt Stingy will have to be a widow now, Lizarann.”

The idea had taken hold, and another young mind that up to that moment had looked on Death as a visitor to other families, not hers, had got to face the black terror—just as terrible a mystery, just as cold a cloud, when that which dies is what none would wish should live, as when all worth living for seems lost with it. Even the opportune removal of an Uncle Bob turns the whole world into an antechamber of the great Unknown, and veils the sun in heaven. Nobody had died, in Lizarann’s immediate circle, so far, and as for outsiders, that was their look out ! Uncle Bob wasn’t wanted certainly, rather the reverse ; but none the less the two large eyes that were fixed on Miss Fossett’s informing face filled slowly with tears, and their small owner’s hands came out towards her, feeling for something to cry on. Yes !—Uncle Bob was dead, and would never mend any more boots ; thus, substantially, the testimony of Teacher, confirming and amplifying the deluge that followed. It was some time before mere awe of Death allowed Lizarann to refer to the fact that Daddy would never enjoy Uncle Bob’s society again ; there may have been ambiguity here—was it all unmixed disadvantage ?—and still longer, quite late in the day, in fact, before her reflections reminded her that Mrs. Hacker’s married daughter Sarah, having wore her cloze out, took up with Mr. Brophy, her present husband. A reminiscence evidently recording the exact language of older persons than herself.

“ What did you say was the name of that gentleman you met at Royd, Yorick ?—the amusing one ? . . . ”

“ Brownrigg ? ”

“ No—the other.”

“ Challis.”



"The same name as the author?"

"He *is* the author. Titus Scroop is his *nom-de-plume*. Why do you ask?"

"Because it must be his wife I wrote Mrs. Steptoe's character for last week. Mrs. Alfred Challis, The Hermitage, Wimbledon."

"Oh yes—that would be. How did you know of her?"

"That Mrs. Eldridge—she's a sort of cousin, you know—wrote to see if I knew of a cook."

"But you knew nothing about Mrs. Steptoe's cooking."

"No!—but she can try."

"I don't call that conscientious."

"Oh, my dear Yorick! Isn't that just like you now? If everyone was such a dragon, no one would ever do a good-natured action."

"Was it good-natured—to Mrs. Challis?"

"It may turn out so. Mrs. Steptoe may be a real treasure."

The above is short and explains itself. The time of it may have been three days after the previous story time.

## CHAPTER XIX

It was certainly our friend Marianne at the Hermitage, Wimbledon, to whom Mrs. Steptoe, now a free-lance, was going to apply for a cook's place. It was rather an audacious piece of effrontery ; so also are two-thirds of the applications the Registry sends you on, and charges you five shillings for. Mrs Steptoe was a very poor cook indeed ; but, then, it was so long since she done any cooking reg'lar that it was easy for her to forget how poor it had been.

The coincidence was not a miraculous one, and it will not appear so if you will image to yourself Mrs. Charlotte Eldridge coming down very late one morning and opening letters. Further, imagine that the contents of one takes her aback. binds her attention, and excites a sort of torpid curiosity in Mr. John Eldridge, who is just off to catch his train ; but the nine thirty-eight will do if he misses it. Then that the lady throws the letter down, and says : " Well, I declare ! Elizabeth Barclay, of all people in the world ! "

Don't try to imagine Mr. Eldridge, nor his hat, nor its band, nor the woollen comforter he buttons his coat over. It isn't worth the effort. But take the story's word for it that he said " Elizabeth Barclay ? " six times, and ended with, " What's she been had up for ? "

" John, you're a fool ! She's Marianne's cook, and she wants me to find her another. Of course ! "

" But what's her game ? What's Marianne's cook's little game ? What's she been a-takin' shares in ? Where's she been selling her dripping to ? Tell away, Lotty !—spit it out ! " But he does not forward matters, for he again says " Elizabeth Barclay " several times, and finishes up with " Well ! "

" When you've done." A pause. " She's going to marry a corn-factor."



Mr. Eldridge closes one eye. "Females do," he says ; and then adds, quite inexplicably : " I shouldn't wonder if he was in the Brixton Road."

" It doesn't matter whether he is or isn't. The question is, where am I to go to find a really good plain cook for Marianne ?"

" Ah !—that's the question."

"Well, but you might help, instead of looking like a gaby."

" Why not ask that party ?"

" What party ?"

" Over Clapham way. Some connection. Where you got Ellen Sayce." Mrs. Eldridge looks her despair, for was not Ellen Sayce a girl who wept on the stairs instead of doing them down, and had to return to her parents ? Nevertheless the attempt was worth a postcard, which was written as Mr. Eldridge—whose peritonitis had gone—trotted away down a snow-swept footway slapping his gloves, and saying " Elizabeth Barclay " at intervals. But she omitted the date, as she decided not to post it then and there, but to exhaust her other resources first. Ellen Sayce was a poor result.

The consequence of this was that for a month or thereabouts Mr. Eldridge was never without a topic of conversation, frequently calling attention to the unborn postcard in a recess on his wife's *escritoire*. " I say, Lotty, when's Miss Fossijaw's letter a-going ?" being his form of query, connecting the matter in hand with phosphorus-poisoning, humorously but not intelligently.

However, when Mrs. Eldridge's other presentments ran dry, the postcard was despatched, and reached Adeline Fossett just the moment after Mrs. Steptoe had been submitting her cookworthiness, and lodging her claims for favourable consideration. Whereupon Miss Fossett despatched a summons to her to come next day for a written character (which would do in this case), and the events we know of followed. There was nothing remarkable in the coincidence whatever.

But there was something very remarkable—so Mrs. Challis had thought—about Elizabeth Barclay's unaccountable desire to marry a corn-factor, after being in the

family fourteen years ! For the Challis family had monopolized Mrs. Barclay during the whole of that time, and it was natural it should be indignant at her desertion. In fact, Marianne had hardly been able to believe her ears when one day the good woman, who had been very *distracte* over the ordering of dinner, took advantage of its conclusion to say, through huskiness and hesitation, that she had been thinking it well over, and had decided on it, in spite of her attachment to the family and heartfelt desire to cause it no inconvenience. Being pressed to say what she had decided on—which she had not so far mentioned—she had turned the colour of a tomato, and with a determined rush had said : “ I have decided, ma’am, to change my condition,” and had then revealed the corn-factor with such a tremendous accent on his first syllable that an impression followed it in the mind of Bob Challis, the boy, home for the holidays, that factors of many other goods had been under consideration, and that Mr. Soul had been the fortunate candidate. For his name was actually Seth Soul.

This, of course, was at the Christmas following Challis *père’s* visit to Royd. But Mrs. Barclay had kept her condition unchanged for the time being, to oblige Miss Marianne, which was how she as often as not spoke of Mrs. Challis. That lady had really exerted herself to find a substitute, any plausible application having been referred for settlement to the corn-factor’s *fiancée*. That very honest woman had denounced and rejected every candidate for the place so far. She applied the same formula to all : “ It don’t speak much for her ”—that there was such a flaw in her register, or such a defect in her demeanour. It didn’t speak much for one that she had just taken a twelvemonth’s leisure at a relative’s ; or for another that she smelt of spirits at that time in the morning ; or for another that she nearly came tumblin’ down the kitchen flight, and couldn’t walk straight. It certainly didn’t. But it spoke volumes for Mrs. Barclay’s integrity that she rejected them all, when, by accepting one, she might have flown straight to the corn-factor and nested under his wing, the minute her things were got.

The acceptance of our friend Aunt Stingy was the result of desperation, as we have hinted, on Mrs. Challis’s part.



However, to do her justice, she tried to shift the responsibility off her own shoulders.

"I should not have dared to send her packing after what you said this morning, Titus," said she; scarcely, perhaps, quite fairly. But Titus replied good-humouredly—for think how well that chapter had started!—"Never mind, Polly Anne! I'll be responsible. She'll turn out all right enough, I dare say."

And thus it had come about that Mrs. Steptoe found herself, within six weeks of her husband's death, in a situation where, although its standard of cooking was no better than that of most English houses of the same type, she was hard put to it to keep up the pretence of any knowledge at all. A very slight early experience had to go a long way, and detection and conviction would have ensued if Marianne Challis had profited by her dozen of years of house-keeping. But Elizabeth Barclay had been a treasure; and treasures—that is to say, persons who don't drink, can roast and boil, and know three sorts of soup—make it quite unnecessary for any English mistress to give any thought to the subject. The new cook, too, was entrenched in a strong position. Who shall say that any chance person who does not know how to pull and grill now was incompetent to pull and grill ten or fifteen years ago? Or that it is impossible that she passed a culinary youth in contact with mayonnaise sauce, truffles, or Gorgonzola cheese, and yet should in that period have forgotten the very names of them? The problem Aunt Stingy had to solve was how to acquire knowledge without admitting ignorance. And the attitude she took up in the pursuit of this object was that of a higher cult graciously stooping to accommodate itself to insular prejudice or mere bucolic barbarism. She elicited a great deal of information by dwelling on skilful achievements hard to believe in, but practised for all that in the Augustan age of her experience, for the tables of an almost Parisian circle of connoisseurs. There was danger in the method, but her intrepidity was more than Murat-like. As, for instance, when, apropos of omelettes, she said that "we"—that is, the cooks attached to that circle—always made them without eggs. On learning that omelettes contained nothing but

eggs, she exclaimed with the greatest presence of mind, "Oh yes!—what we used to call egg-pancakes."

"I'm afraid you'll have to give this woman the sack, Polly Anne. She can't cook worth a cent." Thus Mr. Challis, sampling something one day at lunch, perhaps an omelette without eggs.

"Oh, *do* have a little patience, Titus!"

"Well—of course we must give her a fair trial. I didn't mean immediately."

"Anyone would have thought you did. And it only upsets me, and does no good at all. Do leave it alone till Elizabeth Barclay has shown her one or two of her receipts. She's very willing to learn, and goes to Chapel." For Marianne was disposed to be lazy about this as about other things, and was inclined to temporise. If Mrs. Steptoe could be educated, why not retain Mrs. Steptoe? "Even if you dined out every night for a time—you know you *can*; look at all those invitations!—it would be better than having to go through it all again. Oh dear!"

But Challis was not anxious either to dine out every night, or to quarrel over the dinners at home. He was really well pleased with himself and his surroundings, when he could feel that he had passed a comfortable domestic evening free from self-questionings and collisions with—well!—that disorder he made the awkward compound word for. But he never got off without scars. When he thought he had succeeded, after a very well-executed quiet evening with his wife, in saying to himself:

"Jam me juvaverit  
Viros relinquere  
Doctaeque conjugis  
Sinu quiescere,"

really almost with earnestness!—all the wind was taken out of his sails by a perfectly uncalled-for reflection on Marianne's education. He was angry after with himself for making it. Besides, no one in his senses could ascribe any abnormal culture to . . . Never you mind!—what on earth had *she* to do with it?

The fact is that, at this date of the story, some two or three weeks after we last heard his voice in that cab that drew up in Grosvenor Square, Challis was keeping watch



and ward over his love of his own home and the mother of his two children. His other world—especially the brilliant and fascinating one that centred in the Megatherium Theatre and the preparation of his new play—was both courted and kept at bay by him. He could make no strong stand against its temptations ; but he could resent them, and did so. And whenever his conscience—however he nicknamed it—had been especially intrusive, he could always rebuke it by a little more home life than usual, by a more patient toleration of some home discomfort. He did not see that the very fact of his doing penance, as it were, for his enjoyment of that outer world of enchantment, was really opening a postern-gate to admit the enemy his culverins were pounding from the battlements. When he paid himself out for that delightful supper with the Megatheriums in the small hours of the morning by showing forbearance over Mrs. Steptoe's fatuous attempts at cookery, he was no more conscious that he was really pleading guilty on the main issue than was Judith Arkroyd, when she declined an invitation to join it, conscious that she was only hedging against her dallyings with perfect truth and honour towards her family in keeping back the lengths she had gone in rehearsals of the part of Aminta Torrington. Mrs. Steptoe's greasy cookery and a dull pompous dinner at the Duke's each did duty as a salve to conscience without the unwilling sharers in either detecting their own self-deception. But it was good for Mr. Ramsay Tomes, who took Miss Arkroyd in to the banquet and bored her by his appreciation more than by his talk ; which Judith mimicked extremely well, to Mr Challis's great delight, when she met him next day at the theatre. And it was good for Mrs. Steptoe, who between Challis's penances and Marianne's indisposition for another excursion into disengaged-cook land, seemed likely to attain the low standard of excellence we have mentioned as satisfactory to the British house-keeper.

Marianne gave her husband no help. Of course, she was not bound to. *We know !* No woman is under any legal obligation to assist her husband against himself, if his affections—promised at the altar, don't you see ?—become weak-kneed and uncertain. He may have to love

uphill, but he must take his chance of that. Still, she need not skid his wheels or put stones in his path. But did Marianne do so ?

In our opinion she did. Mere words, told in a story, go for little ; a shade of accent makes them much or nothing. How, we ask you, did Bob Challis, Rugby-sharpened, know that his mater, whenever she made an allusion to churches or chapels, was having a fling at his Governor ? How did Bob know that his Governor was making no answer in italics, as one might say, when he turned to him and said : “ Got your new skates, human schoolboy ? Let’s have a look ! Now, why is it no new strap ever has a hole in the right place ? ” And made conversation, transparently. Bob did know, somehow ; and had he been present to hear his mother say that Mrs. Steptoe went to Chapel, he would have quite understood her inflection of voice to convey an addendum, “ which *you* don’t ; or, at least, Church, and you wouldn’t say the responses if you did.”

If Mrs. Challis would only have left that point alone, it would have made a world of difference in her relation with her husband. Why would she not ? He had left her free to secure salvation, not only to her own children, but to her nephew or stepson, whichever you like to call Bob. And he had made no conditions except that he himself should be allowed the luxury of perdition on his own terms. “ You let me go to the Devil my own way, Polly Anne,” he had said, “ and you shall have poor Kate’s boy, and tell him any gammon you like.” Perhaps the reason why he said—just now in the story—“ *Docta conjux*, indeed ! ” may have been some memory of how, when Bob blacked another boy’s eye for calling the Founder of Christianity a Jew, Marianne had defended his action, and condemned the other boy for impiety and heathenism. “ And you know I’m right, Titus,” said the lady triumphantly.

Of course, it is impossible to say that a really honest fulfilment of the religious bargain would have diverted the current of events into another channel. All the story points to is that if Challis could have reposed on the bosom of his “ *docta conjux* ” with less fear of its bristling sud-



denly—like the image of the Virgin with which the Inquisition convinced the most sceptical—with suggestions of precept or reproof, even as the blessed image shot out spikes, then there would have been one needless apple of discord the less. And if Marianne had carried out her half of the compact, Titus would certainly have been more scrupulous in saying, before the boy, things of a racy nature on subjects of reverence in the eyes of all Christendom and many thoughtful persons outside it. It wasn't fair to Marianne, who had no sense of humour at all, to develop an old line of critical analysis of the Scriptures for the benefit of Bob; to consider that young man, in fact, as a Bible Class, anxious to discover and record the first mentions of all the trades, all the professions, all the popular complaints delicacy allows to be canvassed in public, all the sports and all the winners, in a volume his mother regarded as sacred. What did it matter how indistinct an idea she had of what she meant by the word *sacred*, or anything else? She might at least have been spared one especial atrocity—the first mention of pugilism. To do him justice, however, Challis was not himself guilty of this triumph of successful research, which we need not record here. It came home from school with Bob next Easter holidays, and Bob teemed and twinkled with it until at last he got the chance of delivering it into his father's ear as he sat astride of his knee, with all the license of a boy just released from the classics.

"You young scaramouch! Where do you expect to go to? Don't you go and tell your mother that!" For Challis, in the presence of this youth, kept up a certain parade of potential reverence, available in extreme cases. He could countenance the first mention of Cannibalism—"The woman tempted me, and I did eat." But this one ran near the confines of the unpermissible—overpast them.

"Shuttleworth and Graves Minor's going to tell their sisters. Because they'll be in such an awful rage!"

"A very low motive. Perhaps you'll be good enough to regulate your conduct on better models than Shuttleworth and Graves Minor."

"Their father's a Bishop. At least, Graves Minor's is.

He only allows him a shilling a month pocket-money. He's gone to his aunts Jane and Mary's for the holidays because they're infectious. . . ."

"Which—the holidays or the aunts? Pay attention to your antecedents, young man!"

"Neither. They're infectious at home; they've got scarlet fever. He's awfully glad, because his Aunt Jane lives in a haunted house, and he can get out on the leads. I say, pater!"

"What, offspring?"

"When's that lady coming that gave me my skates at Christmas, and the 'Lives of the Buccaneers'?"

"I don't know. I can't say. Some day." Challis has become reserved suddenly. "Give me the little Japanese ash-pan, and find yourself a chair. A strong one, I should recommend." For Bob is at that pleasant growing age that has relapses into babyhood, if not checked by a hint now and then. He accepts the hint this time, but declines the chair, preferring to lean over the back of his father's, and pull his hair.

"The mater hates her. I don't." Now, if this had been said immediately, it would have seemed much slighter conversation, easy to pass by. Coming after a good pause of hair-pulling, it implied a confidence in the speaker's mind that his hearer's had been dwelling, during that pause, on the person he didn't hate and his mother did.

"It's no concern of any young monkey's who his mother hates or doesn't hate."

"Well!—it's true. And I say it's a beastly shame. After all, it wasn't *her* fault that it thawed."

"You unblushing young egotist! Is the whole world to be nothing but skates—skates—skates? *Whose* fault wasn't it? Your mother's?"

"No fear! The mater wanted me to chuck it up, and not skate at all. Rather!" This youth's language depends for expression on a tone of overstrained contempt for experience outside his own. But the desert of his egotism has oases. He reaches one now, and says in quite a natural voice: "I say, pap!"

"Go on, human creature!"

"Shall I tell you what me and Cat . . ."



"What *who*?" This is accompanied by a pantomimic threat of extermination.

"Well! Cat and I, then.... what we call her, when we're alone?"

"By all means. Only look alive! Because your father's cigar is waning, and copy is behindhand. Go it!"

"We call her Judy. Cat and I do. Short for Judith."

"You'll make your little sister as bad as yourself, and she's too sharp by half already. How do you know her name's Judith? It might be Sarah—or Euterpe."

"But it ain't. It's Judith."

"Ah!—but how do you know? That's the point."

"Because we listened. And we knew the mater meant *her*."

Perhaps if Master Bob had seen his father's face, it would have checked his outflow of virgin candour. But he was behind him, and saw nothing. Challis was balancing a nice question in his mind. Ought he not to check this revelation? Was it not like eavesdropping to listen to it? He decided that he might, as Marianne would surely never say before the children anything she would not wish him to hear. But he wanted to know, too. Still, he was conscious enough of his wish to know, to find it necessary to impute his reluctance to be influenced by it to that mental vice he had invented a name for.

"How did you know your mother meant *her*? How did you know she didn't mean the new cook?"

"No fear! *Her* name's Priscilla. Besides, the mater calls her Steptoe. Besides, Aunt Lotty did it, too."

"Did what? What did Aunt Lotty do?"

"Called her Judith. Cat heard her, same as me."

"Probably you ought to say 'same as I,' young man. But it may be an open question." Challis paused, half-minded to request his promising son and heir to keep his confidences in reserve. But the evil genius of himself or Marianne stepped in, and caused Catharine, the little girl, who was still under seven, to sing with her mouth shut as she hung over the bannisters in the passage outside. Master Bob immediately left off pulling his father's hair and rushed to the door, shouting loud enough for the Universe to hear, "Didn't she, Cat?" and ended a per-

fectly orthodox interview for the collection of evidence by lugging the witness in, nearly upside down, to testify.

“Put your sister down, you young ruffian—do you hear?” And Challis adds under his breath: “Much good your school’s doing you!” But the young persons explain simultaneously, “That’s how we do,” not without pride in an ancient usage.

Now, this little provincialism, or scrap of folklore, had its share in moulding events. For consider!—if a Sabine woman, after Rubens, had been put down right-end-up, anxious to make a statement, who could have refused to listen to her? Challis, who would not have objected to hearing no more of what Aunt Lotty said, felt bound to take the readjusted maiden on his knee—she wasn’t Sabine, and he could—and get at the upshot of her disjointed testimony. Master Bob, following ascertained usage, dictated or suggested her evidence; and nipped anticipated statement in the bud, at his convenience. Between the two of them, however, it was clear enough what sort of talk had gone on between their mother and Aunt Lotty.

“After all,” said the vexed man to himself, after packing off his young informants to presumable mischief elsewhere—“after all, what can it matter if Marianne *did* say in a moment of irritation that I might go away to . . .” he paused on the next two words, and finished without them abruptly “. . . altogether if I liked?” Then he tormented himself a little about his own shrinking from uttering the words “my Judith,” and ended by saying them in a cowardly way, under his breath, to show his independence.

He was sitting in his library at the time, opposite to a half-written sheet of foolscap. It was copy, waiting for more copy, which came not. Challis denied his self-accusation that this was owing to the way that fool of a woman’s words had upset him—meaning Charlotte Eldridge; he absolved his wife. Had he not often to wait for an idea, to get a start with? Let him see, where was he? Oh yes!—where Estrild tears off her jewels and flings them at the Ostrogoths. Judith Arkroyd would be simply magnificent there! For this was the great tragedy he



had promised Judith he would try his hand on expressly for her. How that incomparable arm and hand would tell, with Estrild's blood visible on it, torn by the bracelet her vehemence had plucked off ! . . .

Very likely it was all a blunder of the kid's, and Charlotte Eldridge had never said any such thing. Was it likely she would say, "Of course, Titus calls her Judith, when they're alone"? Still, the deposition did sound like that, and that was a damnable mischief-making woman, mind you ! Challis was conscious, as he said this to himself, of an image of Charlotte Eldridge, rather a graceful one, turning an impish glance over her shoulder to see the effect of some apple of discord, just thrown. There was a skittishness about this image, a skirt-sweep, that was true to life. So was the becoming hat the odious woman always wore indoors whenever she could, with that meaning feather in it. How Challis hated her as he thought to himself that they all meant, somehow, her studentship in the University in which that dowdy Eros, whom we mentioned before, was Dean of the Faculty of Discord-breeding between a lady and gentleman, about a gentleman or lady. But they were the constituents of a Stylish Female, according to John Eldridge, her husband, the victim of peritonitis.

"Come *in* !" No wonder Mr. Challis said it a little impatiently, when a knock came at his study-door, because he had just got his idea, and was at last effectively at work again upon the Ostrogoths. The impatience caused Marianne, who had knocked, to say that another time would do as well. But to her husband's sensitive hearing the tone, distant and severe, in which she said it spoke volumes. And the Tables of Contents of those volumes related to gulfs placed between married couples resident in Wimbledon by fashionable beauties with a turn for the stage. It was a large order for a mere tone of voice, but it was quite filled out, as the commercial phrase is. Challis could not possibly allow Marianne to depart, closing the door with aggressive gentleness. It would have been checking the items of the large order. "Come back !" he shouted. "What *is* it ? How *can* you be absurd, Polly Anne ? Come in !"

Polly Anne came in, but every step of her entry was

fraught with instant withdrawal. "I won't keep you a minute, because of Steptoe and the dinner," she said, jumbling her context horribly. "Only I must know if you're going out or not."

Challis really tried to be jolly and good-natured over it. "Oh no ! it's all right," said he. "I'm at home to-night."

"You had better make sure." She spoke rather like an iceberg—a forbearing one, but still an iceberg. "Look at your cards on the chimney-piece."

Now, the fact was that the lady knew the position, having gone over the ground the evening before in her husband's absence. "The pink card !" said she. And thus guided, Challis found himself brought to book—convicted of inconsiderate forgetfulness alike of his friend and his household. "I wish you would be more careful," said the iceberg.

"But I really did think the Acropolis was to-morrow, the twenty-third."

"To-day is the twenty-third." One more degree of frost on the iceberg.

"I thought to-day was Wednesday." A feeble effort to extenuate.

"To-day is Thursday. You see on the card. It doesn't matter. I can easily arrange with Steptoe. . . . Oh no !—you can't throw them over at the last moment. Quite absurd !"

"Well !—I'm awfully sorry."

"It makes no difference at all. Now, I won't disturb you any more." And the iceberg retired.

But if Challis had given way to his first impulse, had run after his wife, kissed her, said good-humouredly, "Don't be miffy, Polly Anne !—I shall be at home to-morrow. And you know the Acropolites *did* ask you too"—had he done this, all might have gone better. But his impulse was weakened by the thought—or the knowledge—that his wife knew perfectly well when she entered the room that he had this engagement, and must already have made all her household arrangements with reference to it. He resented her insincerity, and though he rose from his chair and went towards the door, his resentment had the best of it half-way, and he bit his lip and returned,



looking vexed. Now, why couldn't she have said honestly to him at breakfast, "Recollect, to-night's the Acropolis dinner"? He was in such a state of sensitive irritation that, just as he was getting into stroke again, he had a new upset—caught a crab, as it were—because Estrild reminded him of Eldridge, and brought the whole vexation back in full force!

## CHAPTER XX

BE good enough to note that none of the characters in this story are picturesque or heroic—only chance samples of folk such as you may see pass your window now, this moment, if you will only lay your book down and look out. They are passing—passing all day long—each with a story. And some little thing you see, a meeting, a parting, a quickened step, a hesitation and return, may make the next hour the turning-point of an existence. For it is of such little things the great ones are made; and this is a tale made up of trifles—trifles touching human souls that, for aught we know to the contrary, may last for ever.

It is the share Marianne had in a thousand little things like the triviality with which our last chapter ended that makes us say that she gave her husband no help against himself. Many a time a word of concession from her, in answer to any of his unspoken appeals for help—for the plain truth is, he made many such appeals—might have led to a rushed embrace of reconciliation, and a flood of not altogether uncontrite tears from her, and even some from him; for though one may pity him, he cannot be held absolutely blameless. The fact is, Alfred Challis had loved this Marianne even better than ever he did her sister, Bob's mother—loved her, that is, as men love what is called *beauté de diable*, and a kind of rough, good-natured manner. Besides, see how good she was with the boy!

If there had been no core of jealous reserve born of overstrained self-respect inside this rosy-seeming apple—if the girl would have obligingly matured without change—she would always have remained Polly Anne, as of old. But the core was there, and there Challis was to find it, after a pleasant year or so of experience of the outside of the fruit—the best part. Hence she came to be Marianne



rather than Polly Anne to him, oftener and oftener ; Mrs. Challis rather than Marianne to friends ; and “ your mother ” rather than “ mamma ” to the children.

She was not the woman for the position in which she found herself. There was really only one chance of steady sailing for the domestic ship, and that was that she should go everywhere with her husband, brave the snubs of the scornful toff, laugh at her own inferiorities, and, above all, rejoice publicly at every new success of her husband. Inwardly she may have done the last ; all the other conditions she failed in. The one chance was not caught at, and this man found himself alternately in the brilliant world of Imperial London, made much of, looked up to as an authority and quoted, refusing from sheer plenitude welcomes to one rich house after another—all these on the one hand, and on the other—suppose we put it briefly—  
—Mrs. Steptoe.

If Marianne had only had a friend who would have pointed out the exaggerated nature of her impressions about the motley crew we owe so much to Sir Bernard Burke for telling the likes of us about ! A friend, even, who would have said to her, “ Don’t give way to jealous pride, stupid ; but go and observe the ways of the human toff, and come home and tell me, *ici bas*. I’ll do your hair for you.” But there was none such !—only Charlotte Eldridge !

Mrs. Eldridge certainly got some satisfaction out of the concern ; it would have been a sad pity if no one had got any. It was all in the way of her own speciality, the proper—or improper—study of her kind. It may as well be admitted that the conversation the children overheard part of had run thus :

“ I don’t think, dear, that my feeling uneasy whenever John is out of my sight ought to count. John is a fool. Besides, girls that apply for situations are very mixed, whether telegraph or sorters. The most dangerous class of girl may apply. The safeguard in his case is that there is so little reserve in his nature. When his admiration is excited he always makes grimaces about them, and then I know who, at once. If taxed with them he always whistles popular airs and shuts one eye. ‘ Pop goes the

Weasel' or 'Tarara-boomdeay.' But I try to believe he knows where to draw the line. This case is different."

"I don't see the difference."

"The girls are different. This Miss Sibyl What's-her-name . . ."

"The one Titus admires so much is Judith. Sibyl's the Art Coiffeur one, that wanted to do my hair like a picture of Titian's. . . ."

"Titian's mistress, I suppose. They did, then. Well!—I meant Judith. Don't you see how entirely different the cases are? Judith's position!—the publicity, dear!—the whole thing! . . ."

"No!—I see no difference."

"My dear!—what nonsense! Do you mean to say . . . why, only look how he 'Miss Arkroyds' and 'Miss Sibyls' them! One judges from little things."

"When we're here, Titus does. But when they're alone . . . ?"

"Well, of course! When they're alone, Mr. Challis *may* call her Judith. I don't say he *does*, but suppose he does, what does it all amount to? . . . Now *don't* be unreasonable, Marianne dear!"

"I am *not* unreasonable, Charlotte. . . . Nonsense! I'm *not* crying about it. I wouldn't be such a fool. But all I can say is, if Titus wants to go away to his Judith, let him go! I don't want to keep him, against his will. . . . What are those children at, in there?" At which point the conversation may stop.

Incidentally, it helps us to see that Sibyl had lent herself to an effort, which seemed to her—as to us—a politic one, to induce Mrs. Alfred Challis to be a little more coming and tractable. She quite appreciated that friendship between her sister and Challis, if Marianne was included in it, would be a very different thing from the same thing, conditioned otherwise. And when she called at the Hermitage with her sister, she was strongly impressed that scandal, if any arose, would be the more dangerous unless Marianne could be induced to change her attitude, which suggested that of a civil tigress, with a grievance against the jungle.

"You needn't make a fuss about me," said Mrs. Challis



to her husband, just departing for the Acropolis Club. He always went through an apologetic phase, partly real, every time he deserted the domestic hearth. This time his remorse was superficial ; for surely Marianne might just as well have accompanied him to this entertainment. You know the Acropolis Club, no doubt ?—a cock-and-hen club of the purest water, with about the proportion of hens one sees in farmyards. He would have preferred her coming. However, he wasn't to make a fuss about her ; that was settled. It was fine, she said ; and Charlotte had said she would come in if it was fine. Challis became aware that Charlotte must have said she would come in, sometime before he himself had been reminded of his engagement to go out. His remorse vanished all the quicker, and he was beginning to enjoy his clean shirt-front—a phrase his mind put by for his next story on any light social subject—before his hansom landed him at Wimbledon Station. The Acropolis, you remember, is barely ten minutes cab from Waterloo, so this way did perfectly.

“ John finds it do better,” said Mrs. Eldridge, arriving in due course. “ Only when he wants a walk he goes by East Putney, because the District saves him at the other end. Eight o'clock dinner, I suppose. Besides, they won't be punctual. They never are, nowadays.” This was said to show how thoroughly *au fait* the speaker was of the ways of fashionable life. It was mere talk by the way, unspiced by direct reference to any Eros, respectable or otherwise.

“ I know nothing about them,” said Marianne damningly—that is, so far as a suggestion that she was none the worse thereby could condemn. Another, that it was best to know little of the class referred to, was latent. It rankled though, all the more that Mrs. Eldridge's expressive silence recognised its existence better than words. A garrulous person's silence may have all the force of a pause in a symphony. When the *bâton* of Mrs. Eldridge's conductor, Mischief, allowed the music to steal gently in again, it came on tiptoe, with subtle finished skill ; a pianissimo flute-phrase in the stillness, harbinger perhaps of a volume of sound.

"Couldn't you—Marianne dear—couldn't you . . . ?"

"Couldn't I what?" It may be unfair to use the adjective grumpy to describe this question. When a lady beds her chin in both hands, with her elbows on her knees, and gazes at a slow-combustion stove doing its best, while she speaks, her words may have an altogether false effect.

"Ah—well! Perhaps I oughtn't to say. . . . Never mind, dear! Let's talk of something else. How's Mrs. Steptoe getting on with her soups?" A brisk rally of the orchestra—a rousing thrill on the drum. But too artificial!

"Elizabeth Barclay's been here to-day, to show her about blotting-paper. Greasy, and then Titus grumbles. But what did you mean to say?"

The conductor hushes the orchestra—gives gentle permission again to the flute. "No, dear, I oughtn't to say. Because I know how you feel about it, exactly. But what I thought of saying was . . ."

"Yes. Do go on, Charlotte!"

"Couldn't you have made up your mind to go—just this once? Because you *were* asked, this time."

"I shouldn't have enjoyed myself."

"Of course not, dear! Neither should I. But you know what I think. It all turns on a question of prudence. *Anything* is better than an *esclandre*." The other instruments come in again, and the conductor is warming to his work.

"I don't see why we want anything French in it. There's nothing of that sort, so far as I know."

"Of course not, with the people!" Given, that is, this character cast, Parisian laxities have no chance. But distinctions must be made. "Nobody's the least likely to *do*, but people will *say*, exactly the same as if they did do." Better expressed by Hamlet, in the plague he offered poor Ophelia as a dowry! Who shall escape calumny?

Marianne mutters something her friend takes to be, "I don't care what people say." The orchestra—pursuing our strained musical metaphor—sees a *crescendo* phrase ahead, and the conductor interprets it as *accelerando*.

"That's where you're so wrong, dear—do forgive me for



saying it ! But you *are* wrong. Pure and honest natures like yours always make that mistake. Of course you know, and I know—we all know—that to speak of anything really wrong in the same breath with your husband would be absurd, and even this fashionable girl for that matter. I mean, you know, really wrong.” A nod-supported whisper—the music goes to *pianissimo* quite suddenly ; consider the sharp ears of Mrs. Steptoe, and Harmood, in the kitchen ! But enough of that. *Our* text calls for no secrecies ; brush them aside, and resume without pedals, but *con espressione*. “ But everyone is not like you, dear ! So many people take pleasure in putting—well ! the most horrid constructions on the most *innocent*. . . . What ? ” For Mrs. Charlotte had stopped to gloat so long over the first syllable of *innocent*—she did not enjoy the “ horrid constructions ” half so much—that she had heard what Marianne said. Who, on request, repeated it :

“ I didn’t say I didn’t care what people said . . . oh well !—I’ve forgotten what I did say now, and it doesn’t matter. Anyhow, I consider I’ve done *my* duty, and now I simply won’t *go* to any of their dinners, come what may, Acropolis Club or no ! So there ! ” This is a stronger ground than a plea of simple non-enjoyment as a cause of abstention, and Charlotte makes no protest. Her mind, too, is attracted by another point. She speaks dreamily to express that it is feeling its way, as through a mist, to illumination.

“ What was it . . . oh, don’t you know ? Lewis Smithson heard it . . . oh dear !—what *was* the name of the club now ? One of these mixed clubs . . . oh no !—of course, I know what the story itself was—you needn’t tell me that ! . . . I mean what was the name of the club ? ” But Marianne cannot help, and conversation can’t stop for it. At any rate, it wasn’t the Acropolis. Which Mrs. Eldridge repeats more than once confirmatorily, to make the Acropolis safe before resuming the general question. She dismisses the legend itself—what it was does not matter here—as quite unworthy of credence. “ I believe Lewis Smithson made it himself,” she says. “ Anyhow, it’s nonsense. For my part, I should say they were much more likely to be stiff and straight up, for fear of its getting

about. Besides, who was it you said was coming to this party? Lord and Lady Who?"

"Some name like Albatross."

"Ross Tarbet. Why, my dear, they're *the pink!* Corstrechan Castle in Banffshire. Oh no!—it's all right enough as far as that goes. But still I *do* think, if you ask me, it would have been just as well if you hadn't refused."

"Why? I do wish you would speak plainly, Charlotte, and not go round and round."

Mrs. Eldridge won't commit herself to a statement without passing through a period of reflection. It is consistent with the contemplation of the shadow of her free hand, held beyond it, on the screen she is interposing between her face and the fire. Its silhouette of outspread fingers seems to satisfy her, and not to interfere with the thoughts that her drooped eyelids and fixed look are grave about. After quite enough cogitation, she says abruptly: "I wasn't thinking of *at* the dinner. Nor the rest of the evening. But seeing home comes in. However, if you think of it, she would be with the Ross Tarbets, and they would drive her home. Let's see! The club's in Jermyn Street. Her family are in Grosvenor Square. I fancy the Ross Tarbets are in Park Lane. It's all in the way."

Such talk ought to have had a soothing, reassuring influence. Miss Arkroyd under the wing of a live Countess, safe of an escort to the paternal mansion, what more could be asked? Nevertheless, there is an hysterical sound—to Mrs. Eldridge's experienced ear—in the laugh with which Marianne says: "What silly nonsense! As if it made any difference to me if Titus saw the girl home in twenty cabs!"

"Because you have such confidence in Titus, my dear. And that is right! I wouldn't trust John myself. But he's different."

If Marianne had been in the least a humorist, the image of Mr. Eldridge, in danger from an aristocratic enchantress, seeking to unsettle his devotion to the stylish female he could now call his own, would have drawn from her a more genuine laugh than her last. But she was in no mood for laughing, and the greatest booby in Christendom might



have passed muster with her as a parallel to her husband. We are not prepared to say he had not done so in the present case.

Marianne got up uneasily from the low chair she sat on before the fire ; took another, but did not keep it long ; rose again, and walked restlessly about the room. Unlike her !—so thought her companion, glancing up at her keenly, but furtively. Mrs. Eldridge had no definite plan of mischief ; she only wanted the luxury of caressing her favourite subject. She felt a little alarmed, and rather wished the disquieted one would sit down again. But Marianne showed no tendency to do so. On the contrary, she said suddenly : “ I forgot to tell Martha those underthings must not go to the wash. That woman always shrinks them,” and left the room. Mrs. Eldridge heard her bedroom door close above, but no sound of colloquy with Martha. Then her attention was taken off by a tap at the door, whose executant she gave leave to come in.

It was Mrs. Steptoe, meek and creditable as an evening-cook ; to wit, one that has done her washing-up. A sense of chapel hangs upon her, and the cough she gives as preface to speech seems conscious of its indebtedness to a pause in some sort of devotional service undefined. Her widowhood and the distinction of her sudden loss have given Aunt Stingy a chastened identity. But though in the ascendant, she will not obtrude herself. Mrs. Challis—servants seem lately to have left off saying *missis* and *master*—not being to the fore, she will retire and remain in abeyance, exceptin’ rang for. It was only to remind about ordering Huntley and Palmer, Mr. Challis being that particular. But Mrs. Challis would be back directly ; so said Mrs. Eldridge. Aunt Stingy, nothing loth, would remain to chat.

Interrogated, Lizarann’s aunt is finding the place comfortable. The ketching chemley draws a little imperfect, certainly ; but the boiler full up, if hot over-night, lastis on the next day, and any quantity. A great convenience ! It is noticeable about Mrs. Steptoe’s speech that it does not improve when she tries to talk up to her company. When she spoke to her equals in Tallack Street, without desire to impress, she was provincial and unpolished, but seldom

Cockney. Now, her attempts to be classical and win respect from Mrs. Eldridge are failures.

“What sort of a place was Mrs. Fossett’s?”

“*Miss!*—excusin’ my makin’ bold to correct. But not in a place there. Only as a reference.”

“Where was your last place, then?” But Mrs. Steptoe explained, with many reserves and sidelights, that she had never been truly in service; having led, broadly speaking, a regal life, until she married beneath her, but, nevertheless, into a respectable trade connection. The suggestion that her husband’s brain had been affected rounded off a tale that hinted at ancestry and a pursuing evil destiny—the race of Laius! “But you used to cook, wherever you were, once,” said Mrs. Eldridge, wedded to practical issues.

“Oh, there, now!—cook, indeed! Why, I was sayin’, only to-day, to Miss Harmood, ‘If you could have seen the table they kep’ at Sea View, soups and jellies, and made-up dishes, and the whole attention left to me, in the manner of speakin’.’ Owing, ma’am, you see, to uncertain health, my aunt’s sister—in charge of the establishment—suffering with a complication, and terminated fatally eleven years this Easter Day. Coming back to me, naturally, with the season.” A retrospective sigh, over life’s changes, came well in here.

“Was it a sort of private hotel, or boarding-house?” Mrs. Eldridge thought she saw light.

Mrs. Steptoe conveyed general assent, without close definition. “But very select!” she added. And Mrs. Eldridge said, “Of course,” entirely without reason.

Aunt Stingy felt encouraged, and made up her mind to resume in full all particulars of the banquet we have heard about. After all, she is not the only person that ever dwelt overmuch on scanty incidents of slight importance in themselves; but oases, for all that, in the arid stretches of an eventless life. Besides—as her tale showed after Mrs. Eldridge had heard all about the splendid cooking accommodation of this establishment at Ramsgate, and full particulars almost of every dish on the table—there was revealed a curious sequel to this seaside dissipation, which no doubt would have been communicated to Mrs.



Challis, if that lady had been as inquisitive as her friend. For Mrs. Charlotte hearing of an occasion—fifteen years ago!—when six or eight persons of either sex had dined together, forthwith smelt rats, and made for their places of concealment with the alacrity of a Dandie Dinmont.

“You seem to remember them all very well, Mrs. Steptoe.”

“Along of what followed, no doubt, ma’am.” The speaker appeared to become suddenly reserved, but awaiting catechism for all that.

Mrs. Eldridge’s shrewd intelligence reached the issue promptly. “Perhaps you promised not to tell it. Don’t tell me!” This would have disappointed Aunt Stingy, if she had believed it genuine. But she didn’t, and confirmation of her disbelief came. “Only really, it’s so long ago! It’s almost ridiculous.” The catechumen still awaited pressure. “But do just as you feel, Mrs. Steptoe. Of course, it’s no affair of mine.”

Aunt Stingy laughed slightly, to remove the matter from among grave responsibilities. “Ho, as for that,” she said, “I was never under any promise—only Mr. and Mrs. Hallock wished no reference made. Only, as you was sayin’, such a many years after . . . Is that Mrs. Challis coming?” But it wasn’t.

“She’s speaking to Martha upstairs. She won’t come yet.” Mrs. Eldridge betrays her curiosity—is very transparent. So urged, Aunt Stingy gives, not at all obscurely, a narrative some ten minutes long, which, for all purposes of this story, may be condensed as follows:—

The Mr. and Mrs. Hallock who figure in it had, for some not very evident reasons, felt justified in abetting the marriage of their nursery-governess with a man supposed to be of good means and antecedents, with the full knowledge that this marriage was concealed from her family, and was to remain so for a term. The dinner that was Aunt Stingy’s culinary triumph was a festivity to welcome this happy couple on their return from a short honeymoon. The young gentleman named as Harris among the guests was a friend of the bridegroom. So far, nothing very criminal. But there was a sequel. The Hallocks, returning next season to the same apartments,

where it seemed they spent every summer, frequently referred to the affair, but always with surprise that no news had reached them of the wedded couple, and this in spite of inquiries by letter. "Ungrateful girl!" was their verdict. One morning towards the end of their stay they were dumbfounded by an advertisement of a wedding, in the *Telegraph*. The bride actually bore the name of their ex-governess—her maiden name, that is—while the bridegroom's was, to their nearest recollection, that of the friend who had been introduced to them as Mr. Harris the year before. That was the substance of Mrs. Steptoe's story.

"They were that surprised," she said, "you might have knocked either of 'em down with an electric shock. 'My word,' says Mr. Hallock, 'to think of that!' he says. 'Then Horne must be dead, and that girl married to his friend already! And not so much as a letter!' . . . Oh yes! Mr. Hallock, he was resentful like, but Mrs. Hallock, she leans across to him, and she says: 'My dear, it's a coincidence! Kate never would—never! I *knew* the girl,' she says. So she talked him down, and they put it at a coincidence, and let it go."

"But did you hear no more?"

"*They* heard—not me! Or only remarks fell by chance. There come a letter next day, and they was a-talking and she a-crying over it. Little scraps they let drop, loud enough to reach. 'Ho, the miscreant!' and 'The licensual scoundrel!' And then Mrs. Hallock she says: 'Whatever could possess us, Edwin, not to make more certain about the ceremony?' Then they see me, and dropped to a whisper. Only saying to me after, not to repeat anything I'd heard, which I made the promise, as requested."

"There's Mrs. Challis coming. I wish you could have been more sure of the names, because it's interesting. Couldn't you think them up a little?"

Mrs. Steptoe cogitated. Hallock, of course, she said. Because she knew *them* a long time. But the other names hardly, to be any surer. Except it was the young lady's single name. Because that she see in the newspaper, when she come to look at the advertisement. Then she must have seen the bridegroom's name, said her interrogator.



It seemed not ; the glance was a hurried one. But she was sure about the girl's. It was Catherine Verrall.

This story has only had occasion once to refer to the name of Challis's first wife, Marianne's half-sister. And though Mrs. Eldridge had often talked with her friend about this half-sister, dead five or six years before the families became acquainted, it was always about "Kate"—no other name—or "my sister" when Marianne was the speaker. It is quite an open question whether she would at once have felt the name familiar, if it had not been for Bob's full name. Her knowledge that it was Robert Verrall Challis was perhaps what made her say, "What?—what's that?—did you say Verrall?" with stimulated interest. Mrs. Steptoe repeated "Catherine Verrall" quite distinctly, just as her mistress, returning, opened the door. Mrs. Eldridge hoped, without having had time to make up her mind why, that Marianne had not heard the name. For a few moments she thought she had not. The whole thing happened very rapidly.

Mrs. Steptoe delivered her reminder about Huntley and Palmer's Oatmeal Biscuits, to be ordered with the stores. Mrs. Challis had not forgotten them. One or two other small matters were referred to, and then Mrs. Steptoe said good-night with due humility, and departed. She was instructed not to sit up for Master Bob, who had gone to a neighbour's to assist in acting charades. Marianne would let him in. She did not resume her seat by the fire, but lay down on the sofa, away from it. She had a flushed, turbulent look, and a smell of eau-de-Cologne, backed by ruffled hair over the forehead, conveyed the idea that she had been putting it on her face, to cool it. Mrs. Eldridge felt uneasy. Had she gone too far?

"Was it all right about the flannels?" she asked.

"I think so. I don't know. I didn't see Martha. I felt sick, and lay down. . . . Oh yes!—I'm all right now."

"No, you're not, dear! You look very flushed. Shan't I get something? A little brandy-and-water?"

"Oh heavens, no!—make me sick! Like on the steamer—the very idea makes me ill! There's nothing the matter."

Mrs. Eldridge wasn't convinced. Should she open the

window to let a little air in? She was one of those plaguing people that *will* remedy, whether you like it or no. Mrs. Challis repulsed her open-window movement with some asperity; reduced her to fiddling with her screen with a fixed gaze of solicitude, fraught with ultimatums about medical advice, failing prompt improvement in the patient.

Marianne remained still on the sofa, with her eyes closed for a few minutes. Then she said suddenly, rather as one who turns to an offered relief: "What were you and Steptoe saying about my sister when I came in?"

Her hearer started; grasped the coincidence of name fully for the first time probably. "Your sister, Marianne. . . . Why, how?" And then, with a complete perplexity: "How could that be?"

"My sister was Catherine Verrall—my sister Kate, that died. Why were you talking about her?"

"It must have been another Catherine Verrall—*must* have been."

"*Who* must have been?"

"This girl. Stop, and I'll tell you! . . . But, really, the coincidence!" And, indeed, Mrs. Charlotte seems almost knocked silly by it, as the pugilists say. Marianne is roused and interested at her perplexity—sits up on the sofa fanning herself with her pocket-handkerchief—seems half inclined to laugh.

"What's it all *about*, Charlotte?" she says, and then adds—a little passing tribute to the memory abruptly revived—"Poor Kate!"

"Oh, my dear, of course it's nothing to do with poor Kate. Just an odd coincidence of a girl Mrs. Steptoe knew at Ramsgate, I think—years ago!"

"Kate was at Ramsgate, though, when I was a child. She taught music to some people's children. What *was* their name now?" But the name would not come back, on any terms. Marianne gave it up. Her friend felt actually glad, for the puzzle was too incisive to be pleasant.

"Very likely she was at Ramsgate. Why not? But she hadn't been twice a widow when she married your Titus, at any rate. Come, Marianne!"



"Certainly not! She wasn't nineteen, for one thing. Was this coincidence-lady a widow?"

"Perhaps I had better tell you the story?"

"Much better, I should say." On which Mrs. Eldridge repeats Mrs. Steptoe's tale, neither confounding the persons nor dividing the substance, but with a tendency—very common in narratives we pass on to others, but ourselves have no part in—to substitute descriptions or epithets for names. Thus the Mr. and Mrs. Hallock of the original narrative appeared as "this lady and gentleman" until Mrs. Challis, whose puzzled look was on the increase, asked a question about them:

"What were they—this lady and gentleman? What was their name?"

"I fancy he was a coal-merchant or dealer in something. Mrs. Steptoe didn't say. The name was Hallock." Mrs. Challis sprang up from the sofa, excitedly.

"Charlotte!—*what* did you say? Hallock?"

"Yes—Hallock. Why not?"

Marianne's breath is quite taken away. "But that is the name I had forgotten—Hallock," she says, as soon as she can speak. "They're in one of those photographs in the old book—the one I brought from mother's." Her speech is rapid and frightened. The strangeness of the story is getting its mastery; and she feels, without imaging them, the ambushes in wait for her. "Oh dear!" she gasps, sinking back again on the sofa, "all this—it's so odd! Charlotte, I'm afraid to look at the photograph."

Charlotte's nerves are stronger, and she has recovered from the momentary alarm her friend had given her; is ready, one might say, to be in mischief again. "Don't be a goose, Marianne," she says. "You're frightened of everything. Do let's get the thing explained, dear, instead of going dotty over it. Which photograph book is it? . . . left-hand chiffonier? . . . no?—right-hand . . . top shelf? . . . No!—I won't make a mess. . . . I expect it's this."

It was, and it exactly confirmed Mrs. Eldridge's anticipation of a coal-merchant and his wife, two young daughters, and a governess a few years older than themselves. A stupid seaside photographer's group, but with well-marked

face-features. The artist's address in a little oval underneath, conspicuously Ramsgate.

"Of course it's all some confusion of Mrs. Steptoe's," says Mrs. Eldridge. She knows she is talking nonsense, but she wants to calm all troubled waters while she gets her curiosity satisfied. "You'll see she won't recognise any of these—unless you give her hints, Marianne."

This is unprovoked, and Marianne resents it. "Show them to her when I'm not there if you like. Show her now and I'll go. Only I'm afraid they're gone to bed." If they have, no harm in ringing the bell! It is rung, and evolves Harmood, apologetic for not having gone up yet. And then Mrs. Steptoe, even more so.

Marianne does not go, but then that was mere talk. Mrs. Eldridge wants Steptoe—so she tells her—to see if she recognises a photograph. Aunt Stingy is not dissatisfied to be consulted about anything. Mrs. Eldridge shows diplomacy, astutely getting her to identify Mrs. Challis at different ages. Having put the witness on a false scent, she shows the group, and asks: "Now which of those is Mrs. Challis?"

The witness tried to find an excuse for identification, but failed. But having admitted failure, why hold so tightly to the photo-album?

"Well, Mrs. Steptoe?" Mrs. Eldridge speaks.

"Nothing, ma'am. Oh no!—only what unaccountably caught my eye. Nothing to detain. What would be termed an impression." She relinquished the album slowly with a vaguely constructed "Excusin' the liberty I took, I'm sure!"

"You noticed something, Mrs. Steptoe?"

"In the manner of speaking, yes! But not to detain. It just cut across me like . . . yes, ma'am, thank you, just a minute!" For Mrs. Eldridge had said, "Look at it again," and handed the open book back.

Aunt Stingy looked and looked, in more and more visible bewilderment. Pressed to explain it, she at last said: "I can't make no less of it, put it how you may. That's Mr. and Mrs. Hallock I was telling of, just now half-an-hour gone. And *that* is the young lady."

Iterations, stimulated by an incredulity Mrs. Eldridge



affects in order to procure them, are interrupted by a knock at the front door. Mrs. Steptoe departs to open it. It is Mr. Eldridge, to accompany his wife home. He is not, she says, to hurry and fuss, but to sit down and wait, and not knock things over. He makes the remark, "Somethin' up! Easy does it!" implying, perhaps, readiness to wait for enlightenment, and becomes seated, but knocks nothing over. His wife throws him a gleam, to live on. "We are discussing the identity of a photograph," she says.

An occurrence interposes, Master Bob's arrival; the toleration for a few brief moments of exultation over the evening's successes, and his dismissal to bed, rather disgusted at Europe's want of appreciation. Then Mrs. Steptoe, who had retired to admit him, re-enters and resumes.

"Those are the parties I told you, ma'am," says she, in an undertone of confidence brought forward from the previous conversation, rather definitely exclusive of the newcomer, who had overlapped it. But he has his ideas, and as soon as he has thoroughly polished with his wrist the bridge of a nose he has just blown, he offers counsel:

"No name on 'em? Look on the back. Look on the edges where they tuck in. Nothin' like lookin'!" His wife accepts the suggestion without tribute to his sagacity; and when the photo is slipped from the *passepartout*, there on the back is plainly written: "Mr. and Mrs. Hallock, Nelly, Totty, and self. June, 1888."

"She'll be all right," said Mrs. Eldridge, returning to her husband in the drawing-room a quarter of an hour later. For Mrs. Challis, already upset by her previous interview with her friend, had been in no condition to have it burst upon her suddenly that important events—which she could not the least understand, so far—relating to her sister's life, and perhaps to his own, had been concealed from her by this husband whom she was now called upon to have so much faith in. She had completely broken down; had left the room white as ashes, having been previously flushed and feverish; and had nearly fainted away on the stairs. She had been got safely to bed, and had so far recovered

as to be able to say that she should go to sleep soon. Perhaps her chief wish was to be let alone. She wanted to think to the bottom of this photograph story. What was it all about ?

But Mr. Eldridge perceived that this sort of weather was trying to some constitutions, and suggested drastic treatment. His wife said, "Be quiet while I write this," and ignored his suggestions. She wrote a brief note to Mr. Challis, and left it in his bedroom candlestick on the hall-table outside. He was sure to see it. She then asked her husband whether he was coming, or was going to go on mooning there indefinitely. He chose the former course without insisting on closer definition of the latter.

A couple of hours later Alfred Challis paid a cabman a shilling too much, to avoid discussion, through his confessional *guichet* overhead, and escaped from a guillotine—thanks to its momentary forbearance—in a steady shower of rain that had heard that the wind had fallen, and caught at the opportunity to come down. It was lucky he had a waterproof on, though he had only to negotiate the garden's length to reach shelter and discover his latchkey.

He was not in the best of humours ; all the more so that Miss Arkroyd, who was to have accompanied the Ross Tarbets, had been unable to do so on account of a sprained ankle—a trifle in itself, but warranted to become serious if walked on.

Seeing the envelope after lighting his candle, he opened it and read the note. His comments, in their order, were a "Hm—hm !" of concern and apprehension, another with some impatience in it, a grunt with nothing else, and a suppressed "Damn the woman !" He read it twice, and again, and went upstairs noiselessly.

Marianne was not asleep. She was wide awake, and wholesomely disposed to trust her husband, and tell the events of the evening at whatever risk. It would have to come out some time. Besides, the relief of knowing, either way ! However, to tell him as natural sequence to an enquiry how things had gone with her was one thing ; to rush the position another. She could not bring herself to call out to him—so little concerned about her as to make no such enquiry, and still scintillating, as it were, with



sparks from the brilliancies of his evening's entertainment—to come into her room and hear the story. No, let him go—him and his Grosvenor Squares and Countesses!

Meanwhile he, however little weight he attached to anything Charlotte Eldridge said, conceived that he was on the safe side in paying attention to what she enjoined about a patient whom she had seen, and he had not. She might have been more definite about the nature of the attack. It was just like her to make a mystery of it. But it was evidently better to take her hint not to disturb his wife—now at near one in the morning! Challis made as little noise as possible, and got to bed in his own room, next to hers, without opening the door between lest he should wake her.

This was the text of Mrs. Charlotte's letter :

“She is *much* better, and will sleep. John and I both think you need not be the *least* alarmed. She has been too much excited lately, but will be all right now. Be very careful not to disturb her when you go up. I will try to come round in the morning. C. E.”

## CHAPTER XXI

LIZARANN'S deferred hopes of being allowed to rejoin her Daddy made her heart sick, but they never ceased to be hopes. No undercurrent of despair made itself felt. If Teacher's reassuring tones had not been sufficient, were there not the gentleman's, known to Lizarann's direct simplicity as Mr. Yorick—a designation remaining uncontradicted in his laughing acceptance of it. But he was going back to his own Rectory, in order that Gus should be once more in harness at St. Vulgate's—his own proper field of labour—during the approaching Holy Week. The invalid was enormously better ; so he himself said.

However, Mr. Yorick was destined before his departure to put the crowning corner-stone on the fabric of Lizarann's affection for himself.

“ Now, Miss Coupland,” said he, “ you sit still ! And don't kick ! And then tell me where you suppose you are going to be taken to-day.”

Lizarann was cautious — wouldn't commit herself. “ Who's a-going to tight me ?” she asked, to get a clue.

“ Me,” said Mr. Yorick, falling to the grammatical level of his company. “ I'm going to take you, as soon as ever you've guessed where. But only one guess, mind !”

Lizarann thought this shabby. But then, after all, when there is only one guess worth making, you may just as well use it up and have done with it. She looked from one of the faces that was watching to the other, and back ; then risked her guess. “ To Daddy in the Sospital !” she fairly shouted. But, alas !—disappointment was in store for her.

“ No ! Not Daddy in the Sospital. Guess again.”

“ Oh, Yorick, how can you ? Playing with the child ! I shouldn't have thought you could be so wicked. No, Lizarann dear, don't you believe him ! Daddy's out of



the Hospital, and you're to go and see him. There! . . . I'm telling the truth, child!" For Lizarann, bewildered, still glances from one to the other.

"That's it, Lizarann. Not Daddy in the Sospital, but Daddy out of the Sospital. Now wrap up warm, and we'll go at once." A wild shriek of delight, an "undue subordination" of limbs, as in pictures of a debased period, and a rush for wraps, is followed, we are sorry to say, by some coughing. There is no such thing as flawless event anywhere.

"Oh no!—it won't do her any harm to go out," says Teacher. "Dr. Ferris said it might do her good if it got mild. Now, Lizarann!—Mr. Yorick's ready." For this Monday, known to the Rev. Gus as "Annunciation," and to most of his flock as Lady Day—a dreadful day when your rent isn't ready—had come as a herald of early spring, and a belief in violets was in the air.

"How far mustn't we go to the Sospital?" Lizarann speaks obscurely, but the meaning is clear to her conductor. How long is the road we are not going to the Hospital on?—surely that's clear.

"How far is it to Daddy? Daddy's at home." And, surely enough, when Mr. Yorick comes to Tallack Street he turns the corner. This bewilders Lizarann.

"But Aunt Stingy, she's took a place," she says. She is not certain of the exact sense of her words. The place might be Badajoz; or a Chancellorship of something, with a portfolio. But it doesn't matter! In either case, Aunt Stingy has left her home desolate—cookless! Again Lizarann is sympathetically understood.

"Your Daddy's being seen to, Miss Coupland. So he won't starve. Here we are!" And it is actually true! Lizarann is back in the home she has been eight weeks away from. For although of late the child had been allowed out, cautiously, no expedition had covered the half-mile between the school and Tallack Street. It is actually true that she is back there now, and wild with delight on the knee her Daddy still has left for her—in a rapture of tears and laughter that can just allow—but only just—the moderation of deportment called for when knees but lately

the subjects of comminuted fractures are sat upon, even by very light weights.

Jim was garrulous about the Hospital, and the kindness and attention he had received there. "Yes, master, I was main sorry to come away, one side o' lookin' at it. I'll carry the doctor gentleman and Nurse Lucy in my mind a long day on. Many's the time I said to myself what I'd be tellin' of 'em to the little lass, home again. There was a bit o' sameness, as might be, when you think of it, and I got fixed uneasy-like about the lass. But, dear Lard bless you!—there was a many there worse off than me. Why, there was that pore chap you see, next bed off on the right! How might you suppose he come there?"

"Don't know, Jim; give it up! How was it?" Mr. Yorick does all the conversation. Lizarann will find her tongue presently, when she and Daddy are alone. At present she merely nestles to him, speechless, but blissful. Jim pursues his topic:

"As I made it out, master, it was this sort o' way: It was a kind o' small-arms factory, and there was two young wenches in the finishin' shop o' one mind about him. So it came to making ch'ice, for him. And one o' them, by name Clara, she warns him if she catches him sweet-hearting with her shopmate, she'd just mark him. Both decent girls, ye see! And she was all as good as her word, with a little pot of vitrol, right in his eyes! And he run, roaring mad with pain, and was caught in the machinery, and made a spoiled man of, as I reckon, all his days. Name of Linklater."

"What a terrible business! And it may have been *he* wasn't to blame, either."

"No—pore chap! He'd just no consolation, as you might say. I count myself a well-off man, set against him. Just wait a bit, master, and see me when I'm clear of them crutches. Once I get to use my stick again, anybody'll say, to see me: 'Why, there's a man ain't got anything the matter with him!' Nor yet I shan't have, to speak of!"

Athelstan Taylor could not help comparing Jim's resolute optimism—poor crushed wreck that he was!—with



his sister's aggressive meekness and its pious claim to resignation or uncomplaining acquiescence in what was really a most happy release, though paraded as a cruel blow of Fate. But he could not stay to chat. He had to get back to St. Vulgate's; have a talk about the local flock, chiefly goats, with his friend, who had come home the evening before; pack his trunk, and get to Euston by one-thirty, with or without lunch. So he had only a few more hurried words with Jim.

"You'll think of what I was saying to you, Jim?"

"Sure, master!"

"And the lassie will just trot back to Miss Fossett, before it's dark. She'd better; the house might be cold here. Won't you, Lizarann?" Lizarann will, honour bright! "And how about those kisses I'm to take to my own little girls?" Payable on demand, three crossed to the account of Phœbe, three to Joan; both names being now familiar to drawer. They are very loud—those kisses! Mr. Yorick says farewell and goes. Lizarann and her Daddy are again alone together. Eight whole weeks!

Oh, the hours that had seemed weeks, and the days that had seemed years, of waiting—waiting for this moment. And here it was! Daddy himself—come back out of that mysterious Hospital, where Lizarann had never been to see him! No wonder Lizarann did not know where to begin!

"Well, then, little lass! They haven't cut the little lass's tongue out amongst 'em?" A vehement head-shake of denial precedes the first of the many things Lizarann can select, at random, from the multitude she has been resolving to tell Daddy all through this dreary period of privation.

"Teacher's new cat's black all over, only white on the stomach. Yass! And four of the kittens was drowned." Jim's sympathies are all ready for Teacher's cat's kittens. But he is not further called on to show them, for the child deserts the kittens almost instantly with "Oh, Daddy!—they took you to the Sospital."

"Coorse they did! How many policeman was there, lassy?"

"There was free I see first. And one he turned back down the road. Only there was men, as well as policemen."

“Chaps?”

“Yass! And there was the boys. And there was a woman. And there was another woman. Only not sober.” So she didn’t count, that one; was civilly disqualified, as it were. But was the sober one making herself of use?—Jim enquires. “She wasn’t finding any fault,” is all the testimony Lizarann can give. It seems to imply that the drunken one was indicting the executive. Lizarann finishes up her report: “Then there was Mother Groves, and the ’ot-chestnut stall at the corner, and the Young Varmint.” For this is the name—no less—by which Frederick Hawkins is known to Lizarann and her Daddy.

“So there they all was, the biling of ’em,” said Jim. “And there was Daddy, he’d got himself under a cart, and was a bit the worse by it. And his little lass, she come and kissed him, for to cheer him up—hay, lassy? Nor never cried, nor made no noise, like he told her not to.”

Lizarann felt proud and happy. But she could not endure a position with the slightest false pretence in it. “I *did* cried, too,” she said, “when I got so far as Dartley Street. And the boy, he says not to water-cart.”

“The Young Varmint?”

“Yass! He toldited me his nime, he did. Hawkins—Frederick—Hawkins.” Lizarann gives the exact words the boy had said. “And he says not to water-cart because of his aunt and uncle. Took to the Sospital quite flat they was, and begun singing a fortnight after!” Jim made concession to the Young Varmint—went so far as to say that he would not warm his hide for him this time, pr’aps! But he spoke without confidence of the like abstention being justified in the future.

“And then the lassie come home,” said he. “And who come to the door?”

“Only me, Daddy!”

“Ah!—but t’other side—who come?”

“Uncle Bob didn’t come to the door, only he set it just on the jar for me to push.” Clearly “coming to a door” involves opening it wide for friends, or conferring with strangers to learn their reason for knocking or ringing. He who takes letters from a letter-box does not go to the



door, even if he rushes downstairs like a madman when the postman's knock comes.

You may be sure that Lizarann's narrative that followed was full of little niceties of language, as spoken in Tallack Street. But you have had all the substance, and it need not be repeated in a new form.

Jim interspersed the story of the suppression of his delirious brother-in-law with exclamations of applause. Lizarann deserved what the players call "a hand" now and again for the vivacity of her descriptive report of the knife scene, with its dramatic ending of the application of the spent lucifer-match to Uncle Bob's hand. "He just give one scroatch, and there he was!" The introduction of a new self-explanatory word into the language alone deserved recognition. But Jim was not concerned with this. The conduct of Athelstan Taylor in a difficult position took his attention off minor points.

"I could have named the sart of man he was," said he, speaking half to himself, "from the feel of his hand, and maybe no more than just a 'Good-marning, mate!' by the way. And—but to think of it!—him a *parson*!" Jim couldn't get over this at all. He dwelt on the unfitness of the arrangement: "Now, if they'd 'a made pore Bob a parson, it might 'a broke him of his habit, and we'd not have had a bad miss of him on our side." He seemed to go on thinking of the subject in all its aspects—possibly of the utilisation of ecclesiastical preferments as an antidote to drunkenness. But his fingers kept wandering about his little girl's face and head, as if to detect the change eight weeks had made in it.

"Uncle Bob's dead," said she, getting closer to say it, in a dropped, awe-struck voice.

"Ah—he's dead! He might have turned over a better day's work, mayhap! But Lard!—if you come to that, what a many of us mightn't! Poor Bob!"

"Does it hurt, Daddy?"

"Does what hurt, lassie?"

"Being dead."

"I reckoned you might mean my old leg.... No—it don't hurt, bless you!—not good little lassies, like mine. Other folks' I couldn't say about. They do say the Devil

gets some on 'em, now and again. But he ain't a sartainty, himself. Though in coorse he manages all he can see his way to." That is to say that, unless handicapped by absolute non-existence, Satan might be trusted to do his best to get all bad little lassies.

Lizarann knew her catechism, and all that was necessary for her salvation, as school-knowledge. But she could not help being curious about these things as actual facts—knowledge-knowledge, one might say. Daddy could be relied on. Why not go straight to the point? So after some mere conversation-making about whether Mr. Winkleson had ever actually seen the Devil, Lizarann did so. "Has he got Uncle Bob?" she asked.

Her father's answer was not consistent with his previous expressions of opinion. "Never you fear for him, lass! The Devil don't take a poor chap for making mistakes with his grog. And as for his handling that knife a bit too free, I doubt the liquor had just got the mastery of him. And then, you know, lass, a man ain't himself when that happens. Ye may make your mind easy about Bob."

So Lizarann felt no further disquiet. Perhaps she was unconsciously soothed by observing the differences of opinion among her seniors—Mr. Winkleson, Teacher, and Daddy. The last was most likely to know, and gave the pleasantest answer to the problem.

"And there was my little lass out in the snow in her night-shimmee. To think of that! And her Daddy all the while no more use than a turned turtle!" This had to be explained; and the continuity of the conversation was risked, owing to Lizarann's womanly pity for turtles on their backs and helpless. However, this very pity caused reaction towards the previous questions, as Jim's situation had been no better than that of the turtles. Lizarann had to cry a little over this, and then renewed her petition—previous applications having been met by evasion or postponement—to actually see the wooden substitute for a limb that, in spite of its boasted efficacy, compelled her Daddy to sit on a chair with more or less disguise of coat or blanket over it, both limbs being preferably kept horizontal for the present. But she might look at it, sure, might Lizarann; and, indeed, anyone would have thought, to



see Jim exhibiting the business-end of a very new wooden leg, that some great improvement on a previous unsatisfactory condition had been attained. The little woman was incredulous about this ; and, suspecting guile, put her Daddy through a severe cross-examination.

“ ‘Sposin’ you was obliged to it, Daddy ; ‘sposin’ you had to walk all the way up Tallack Street, and all the way acrost Cazenove Street, and all the way acrost Trott Street to Blading Street where the cart was . . . ? ”

“ Lard, lassie !—I could do it on my head, as the saying is, any minute o’ the week ! ” But Jim demurs to an actual performance—says the doctor don’t allow any tricks to be played. Lizarann gives the point up ; but, oh dear !—how dreadfully afraid she feels that she is being practised on, and that in reality this shiny, well-turned, clean-leather-strapped contraption is, after all, no better—even perhaps worse—than an ordinary human foot. She will—she must !—elicit the truth somehow.

“ Daddy ! ”

“ Lassie ! ”

“ When you was out on the yard-arm, and the wind was a-freshenin’ up from the south . . . ”

“ To be sure, lass ! Freshening to a three-quarter gale, and none too little canvas on her. . . . Easy ahead, lassie ! ” Jim is only helping the memory of the well-worn story, and the child accepts the prompting.

“ . . . None too little canvas on her. And Peter Cortright and Marmaduke Flyn, they was both on the mainyard reefin’ alongside. And Peter Cortright he sings out to look . . . ”

“ Ah !—and your Daddy, he looked, and there he see her, the Dutchman, carrying all sail afore the wind. . . . Well, little lass, and what o’ that ? ”

“ When you was then, ‘sposin’ you’d only had a wooden leg ! ”

Jim’s big laugh comes ; and so lost is he in his little lass, so free from all thought of his own great privation, even in the face of the bygone time, that he can make it a heart-whole laugh and never flinch.

“ ‘Sposin’ I’d only had a wooden leg ? Well—as I reckon it—I shouldn’t have taken much notice. Not for

one such ! If you'd 'a named two wooden legs now, lassie ! That might have constitooted a poor kind of holt on a slippery yard. But I might have made a shift to do, even at that."

Lizarann was silenced, but not convinced. She resolved to thresh the subject out with Bridgetticks, whom she had secretly resolved to call upon on her way home. Bridget might know nothing about wooden legs, but she could cite a parallel experience, having herself walked on her brother's stelts, what he made out of two broomsticks and the foot'old nyled on, and mide syfe with a scrop of narrer iron hooping. She would refer it to Bridgetticks whether her brother—or a Circus, for that matter—could walk upon a bare yard, of which her own image was akin to a yard-measure, with a pair of stelts. If she, Bridget, felt confident of her brother's powers, no doubt Jim's assurance of his own might have been well grounded.

"Doesn't Aunt Stingy come for to see to you, Daddy ?" she asked anxiously. For she couldn't see no sign neither of breakfast, nor yet of dinner, nor yet of supper.

"No—lassie ! Your aunt, she's got to 'tend on somebody else, away off to Wimbledon Common ; and these here Simses—or Groombridges ; I didn't catch the name right—she's got a short let to, are mostly away on a job. So she's packed together her bit of furniture, like you see it, and Mrs. Hacker, she's so obliging as to give me her time and attention ; 'cos the master, ye see, he put the matter in trim for me. One don't look for hospital fare all the days of one's life."

Lizarann had heard where her aunt's "place" was, but her experience of places was of such as could be got to by half-past seven in the morning and come back to sleep at home. She thought now that she saw her way to enlightenment.

"Is where Aunt Stingy's gone where Mr. Winkleson lives ?"

"Never a bit of it, lassy ! He's by name Wilkins—Wilkinson Wilkins. This here's Wimbledon, a place with a Common to it. I went there once, for to see a review. I wouldn't mind going to see one again, and take the little lass." Perhaps he meant that his child's sight would



serve for both ; but more probably it was an instance of the strange way blind folk forget their own blindness. " Your aunty, she's come over once or twice, to pack up her traps and make straight, but I've got to put my dependence on Mrs. Hacker, so far as I can't shift for myself."

Lizarann derived from this and what followed one broad impression that the history of No. 27, Tallack Street, had reached the end of a chapter—the one that contained her own biography to date. Another, that Aunt Stingy would be much less in evidence for the future. Another, that a new force had come into her life and Daddy's—a welcome one, connected with Miss Fossett and Mr. Yorick. She had a happy guardian-angel sensation about this, and took it to her bosom with only one slight misgiving—that they were too easily duped by that ridiculous little pipe of Dr. Ferris's, that would hold up like a candlestick certainly, and you could blow through if he let you, but that was impotent for every other purpose.

If this story could ask its reader a question at this point, it would be : " Have you not noticed that Lizarann has scarcely coughed, all through this long interview with her Daddy ?" It was the case, anyhow, and rather points to the truth of what a physician once said to ourself, the writer : " If in the early stages of lung-disease doses of unalloyed joy, of perfect happiness, could be administered three times a day to the patient, the later stages would be much rarer than they are at present." Certainly Lizarann's happiness had almost touched rapture, doubts about the wooden leg being the only alloy in the pure gold. And she certainly had coughed mighty little. Perhaps Dr. Ferris would have known what claim Lizarann had to be considered a case of the kind referred to.

The delightful time had to come to an end, and Lizarann found herself compelled to say good-bye. Daddy would have it so, although darkness was a long way off yet awhile. So she departed, bidden first to go to Mrs. Hacker's, and say to that good lady, that she was on no account to be in any tirrit to come away from her own supper to attend to Jim's, for that he had got his pipe, Lizarann having helped him to light it,—a thing to rejoice at, after that one defective usage of an Institution otherwise perfect—and

wasn't in any driving hurry. This message Lizarann gave fairly honestly, in an interview with Mrs. Hacker, which—being repeated to Jim—may be held responsible for some borrowed phrases used lately to describe impressions on her mind of his surroundings. But she was not uneasy about him ; her faith in Mr. Yorick was too great for that.

Having given her message, it did not strike her as a serious transgression to pay a visit to Bridgetticks. The injunction to go straight home covered the line of road—did not deal with continuity of movement. That seemed to her a just interpretation of it. But of course not stopping only five minutes !

So she went next to the door of Bridgetticks, and shouted through its keyhole, in preference to knocking or ringing. But Bridget was assisting her mother at the washtub, and up to her elbers in suds ; so she sent an emissary to the door instead of going herself. He was very young, and was eating an apple ; he was, in fact, too young and crude to be trusted to do like he was told ; and he put a false construction on his mission, endeavouring to spit some of his apple through the keyhole, with a mistaken hospitality. His name was, as pronounced, Halexandericks. His bursts of laughter at each new failure of his attempts on the keyhole obscured the voice that was calling through it. He had a vacuous though not unpleasant laugh.

“ I'll let you know directly, if you don't open that door,” shouted his sister. She gave close particulars of the means she would resort to, but without effect. So she onsoaped the suds off of her arms, which she then placed akimbo, and went herself ; not without a certain dancing effect, in consonance with a rhythmic utterance difficult to class as either song or recitation. Its words were certainly, “ Waxy diddle-iddle-iddle, high-gee-wo !” ending in a pounce on Alexander, who spat his last piece of apple in his captor's face with a fiendish crow of delight. She wiped it off on his costume without comment.

“ I seen my Daddy,” said Lizarann, beaming, when the door was opened.

“ I seen him afore ever you did,” said Bsidget, not to be outdone. “ I seen him fetched along in a cab, last night just on seven-thirty. I seen him holped into the houre.”



“ You story !” said Lizarann, hurt. “ He can help himself, he can. He don’t call for no help. Who was helping of him ?”

“ Clapham Church Parsing—same as see your uncle Mr. Steptoe drowned—and rilewye-stytion cabman with rilings for trunks atop. Three thousand six hundred and thirty-two. Got him indoors they did.”

Lizarann felt inclined to cry ; this was a throw-back ! But she wasn’t one to give in easily. “ My Daddy says he could swarm up the rigging as soon as not,” said she. “ Only the doctor he says for to keep quiet a bit, owing to prudence.” When Lizarann repeated phrases lately heard, you would have thought, to listen to her, she was quite a big girl.

Now, it must not be supposed that Lizarann and Bridgetticks had not met during the past eight weeks. On the contrary, visits had been arranged, by request, even before Lizarann had been thought plenty well enough for school, only not to fret herself. These were the terms in which Miss Fossett’s Anne confirmed that lady’s opinion, and sanctioned a continued study of arithmetic and caligraphy. But intercourse during school-hours is fettered by formula ; and when there’s carpets and the bed made and all, you have to set quiet, and it’s not the same thing. So when these two found themselves once more in their old haunt, it was as though a ceremonial padlock had been removed from their tongues. Lizarann’s improved exterior—for Teacher and Anne had reconstructed it—clashed a little with Bridgettickses ; but the principle held good. Here, on Mr. ’Icks’s doorstep, when an imputation of falsehood as an exordium to any reply seemed natural and genial, neither speaker felt bound to check her inspirations. Lizarann and Bridgetticks were themselves again.

They sat on the doorstep, cloze or no !—this referred to Lizarann’s frock—and Bridget retained her younger brother, perhaps for slight rehearsals of the vengeance she had in store for him ; he was that troublesome ! Bridget smelt of soap and warm steam.

“ You wented on stelts, and wooden legs is better than stelts !” Lizarann’s uneasiness rankles, and she longs for public acknowledgment of her Daddy’s prospects of rehabilitation.

"I shouldn't 'a said so," Bridget answered. "Stelts you catches hold atop. Wooden legs is balancin'. Stelts is your hands as well as your legs. Wooden legs you're stood-on-end and pitches yourself over, just as like as not. Not onlest you have crutches. Your Daddy he's crutches, he has. I see 'em myself!" Lizarann could say nothing about Job's comforters, if only because, on the one occasion when she had heard them mentioned—by Mr. Winkleson—she had supposed them to be woollen ones. Besides, she was interested on another point.

"My Daddy hasn't no scrutches," said she. She had caught their name, without understanding it, when her father used it; and now decided on denying them provisionally, pending inquiry into their nature. "What's a scrutch?"

"Oh, you little ignorance!" said Bridget. "Never to know what a crutch is, at your age!" She appealed to her infant brother to say, directly minute, what a crutch was, or she would take advantage of his unprotected youth to smack him. His reply, needing interpretation, was that it was a penny-farden. Halexandericks had evidently a turn for negotiation. His sister cast him off, telling him to go and ply by himself on the pivement, and then resumed: "If you'd 'a knowed 'em when you seed 'em, you might have kep' your eye open, and took note."

Lizarann, skipping the unnecessary, immediately replied: "Daddy said they was second-hand, and to go back when done with."

Bridget skipped some more. "Very well, then!—you see them cross-pieces for the 'ands? . . . Very well, then!—there's a lather pad for under the shoulder-j'int, and they're n'isy going down the street. Now don't you go to say I never told you." There was nothing really unkind or overbearing in Bridget's peculiar manner; it was only the strong working of a leading mind. She was, in fact, a very clever child, being less than two years her friend's senior.

She saw that Lizarann was downcast by hearing of the crutches, never having rightly appreciated the position, and set herself good-naturedly to consolation. "It's always tender where your leg's took off," said she, "and



you want something to ketch the weight, walking." She spoke as if she had often had legs off. "But my father, he says it's nothing to get the hump about, with a little accommodatin'. And I seen a man with one leg and one crutch took two coppers to tike him to the stytion." Lizarann brightened visibly. "You see what your Daddy he'll look like when he's been a month in the country!"

Obviously this was repetition of something said by an older mouth. "Who toldited anything about the country?" said Lizarann.

"Clapham Church Parsing. Him as see Mr. Steptoe drowned. I heard him telling. 'You see,'—he says to your Daddy—'you see what you'll feel like when you've been a month in the country,' he says. 'You do just as I tell you,' he says, 'and I'll make it all square for you,' he says. And then he says you to go too."

"Me!" Lizarann exclaimed, open-mouthed with amazement. And then Bridgetticks gave more particulars of what really was a bout of careful eavesdropping on her part, she having succeeded in overhearing a good deal of conversation between Jim and the Rector of Royd, who had accompanied him from the Hospital the night before. It pointed to a scheme by which Lizarann was to be taken in at the Rectory, and carefully nurtured—treated, in fact, for a disease which had existence only on the authority of that lying little stethoscope of Dr. Ferris's! However, as long as no project involved a new separation from Daddy, what did Lizarann care?

Besides, look at the new experience of a world she had been so little in—it was glorious to think of! She was not so much dazzled as she might have been had every minute of her life been passed—for instance—in Drury Lane. She and Bridget had both benefited by school-treats. "I've been in the country," she said. "It's at Dorking."

But Bridget had a larger horizon. "There's more sorts than that," said she, "without taking count of foring parts. Like you'll find when you done some more geography." Lizarann felt awestruck.

But it was getting along towards six, and she knew she ought to be reporting herself to Teacher. Perhaps she

would have delayed still later, if she had not become anxious to ask that lady point-blank about this fascinating bucolic scheme. As it was, she was received with some displeasure—on her own behalf entirely—and decided to postpone investigations. We, for our part, have never believed that that extra half-hour of exposure to the evening air made in the long run the slightest difference.



## CHAPTER XXII

IF there had been no cause of irritation between Alfred Challis and his wife about his relations with Grosvenor Square, it would have mattered much less what he kept back from her of his previous history. And if he had taken her fully into his confidence about the story of his early marriage with her sister, his relations with Grosvenor Square would have been much less capable of embitterment and misinterpretation. But his palpable concealment of Heaven-knew-what from one who conceived she had of all others the fullest right to know it, played the part, in this domestic misunderstanding, of poor Desdemona's bad faith towards her father. "She has deceived her father, and may thee," said Brabantio.

Could Marianne have known *what* Heaven knew, she would probably have held her husband blameless, if ill-judging; though she might have felt very little leniency towards her sister for contracting a marriage unknown to her family. But the ground was not in order for the sowing of a crop of explanation, to be reaped as a harvest of reconciliation. It was cumbered with the clover her husband was supposed to be enjoying at the Acropolis Club and elsewhere, and choked with a creeping weed of Jealousy unacknowledged. And as the trivial things of life are always the ones that play the biggest parts, so that unfortunate resolution not to disturb his wife, when Alfred Challis came home from the Club dinner, had to answer for quite ten times its fair share of the events that followed. No doubt her silence was a little vindictive—it would have been so easy to give a hint that she was awake—but the truth is it had very little to do with the matter. What had a great deal to do with it was the fact that Mr. Challis had *not* been enjoying himself. Had it been otherwise, he would have felt apologetic; the monitor he would not admit

was his conscience would have prescribed amends to Marianne for contriving to be so jolly without her. But she had no guess that her Grosvenor Square enemy was laid up with a sprained ankle, any more than he had that the new cook had been the means of bringing to light a great deal—the worst half in disjointed fragments—of a story his good if mistaken intentions had concealed. For, needless to say, the actual story was still very obscure to her; and Mrs. Eldridge, though clever enough, was a biassed assistant in its elucidation.

Lest it should still be equally obscure to the reader, let him note its broad facts as follows: Edward Keith Horne married, or went through a marriage ceremony, with Kate Verrall, a governess at the house of a coal-merchant named Hallock. Six weeks later he went away to New York, promising an early return; there was some pretence of winding up a relative's affairs. He repudiated his wife shortly after; as she became convinced, and as Challis, his friend, also believed, on legally good grounds. As we have already said, Challis may have met conviction half-way, being in love with the girl himself. Of course, it was he whose name Mrs. Steptoe had remembered wrongly as Harris. And, equally of course, the miserable reprobate of Athelstan Taylor's painful experience at St. Brides was Horne, who succeeded with what was left of his mouth in nearly articulating his true name rightly. "Kay Thorne" was close to the truth, considering the circumstances. This story is fortunate in having very little to do with this man; as his young wife, or victim, may also have been in having for her only adviser a youth with a strong interest in urging her passive acceptance of her position. If only half the betrayed girls in the world could have such an adviser ready to hand! Alas!—how seldom is one found with the courage to say, "Think yourself at least in luck, silly girl, that you are not fettered for life to this lout or devil! Hug to your heart this one consolation, that though you have bought your experience of him, and what he calls love, dear, you have escaped scot-free of the blessed sacrament of marriage!" Too often the poor thing finds herself alone in the desert—the desert where correct expressions grow—sin, and shame, and penitence, and so on—and where



marriage-lines and marriage-settlements make oases, from which she is excluded, for the Grundy family to breed in.

Perhaps Challis had a concealed motive for his decision when, at the time he married Kate's sister, he made up his mind to treat the whole story as a sealed book. But, even with none, was he wrong, knowing that his wife elect was quite convinced that no belonging of hers had ever set foot outside her particular Grundy oasis? Remember, too, that he was only pursuing the course he would have held it a point of honour to pursue if he had never married Marianne at all. Why should his marriage with her make it incumbent on him to dig up a story that his wife had already passed years in ignorance of, without any living creature being perceptibly the worse? No doubt Mrs. Eldridge would have said, with a portentous gush of deep conviction, "She ought to have been told." But why?

At least, the story shows that Challis himself had nothing disgraceful to conceal, and that all his actions were dictated by consideration for others. It is more than likely that an explanation, had the position favoured it, would have ended—if not by placing him in the position of a hero—at least by a discharge with a first-class certificate from the high court of Morality. But the atmosphere teemed with suggestions of malpractice undefined, and the master-hand of Mrs. Eldridge made the most of them.

No explanation took place between Challis and Marianne at the only time when it was easily possible—on the morning after we saw them last. Explanations are like strawberries—bottled up, they spoil. Now, whatever chance there would have been of Challis hearing of the photograph mystery and Mrs. Steptoe's memories was cancelled by the malign arrival on the scene of Mrs. Eldridge and her John, bound for his daily toil at St. Martin's-le-Grand. So, you see, it was early in the morning.

Charlotte had been so uneasy about dear Marianne that she felt she must come over to find out. It was so entirely unexpected. She had been laughing and joking the minute before. So Charlotte thought fit to say, and Challis, to whom it was said privately, detected a flavour of an unasked-for assurance that Marianne was cheerful in his absence. "It" had come quite suddenly, when Marianne

went away to speak to Martha. Challis had no means of guessing what "it" had been, except Mrs. Eldridge's note, and a certain demeanour of his wife's, which no doubt had to answer for an expression of Master Bob's, in secret conclave with his sister Cat. According to him, his mater was savage, if you liked, this morning. Challis had gone to his wife's room to ask about "it" as soon as he heard that the servant had abated; and had been told, coldly, that nothing had been the matter that Marianne knew of. His production of Mrs. Eldridge's note was met by, "That's just like Charlotte!" He waited a few moments for counter-inquiry about himself, rather anxious to tell what a failure the Acropolis had turned out; but no curiosity was shown, and he went back to his own room to dress, saying nothing further. Had he been wise, he would have sat on the bed in his pyjamas, and said he meant to stop there until the mystery was accounted for.

Matters got definitely worse when Mrs. Eldridge, whose invasion occurred just at the end of breakfast, took advantage of a chance exit of Marianne's, in connection with housekeeping matters, to follow her and contrive a sympathetic interview within hearing of the two gentlemen. Not that a word was audible, but anyone with the slightest knowledge of human nature would have discerned that one of the speakers, the tone of whose voice was mellow with the opposite sexes of the persons she was speaking of, was recognising the patience and forbearance of the other under trials, and exhorting her to renewed efforts in the same direction.

"What do you suppose was the matter?" Challis was filling his pipe, as he asked this question of Mr. Eldridge.

"Mean to say you don't know?"

"I certainly don't. Nobody has told me."

"I ain't any help. Don't ask me—that's all! Don't put it on me to say!" Mr. Eldridge, however, implies that his attitude is one of Discretion, not Ignorance. For he closes one eye, an action that can bear no other interpretation. He also shakes his head continuously and gently, as one who would convey to an interviewer the hopelessness of cross-examination.

"I suppose it was nothing but an upset. The weather's



trying.” It had really been unusually normal. But Mr. Challis was talking as gentlemen do when they are lighting a pipe, and thinking more about whether that’s enough than about the topic in hand.

“Stomach!” said Mr. Eldridge, as nearly in a monosyllable as spelling permits. He repeated the word just half-a-dozen times in a run; then added this rider: “Say nervous system, when a lady. Puts it better.”

“Something of that sort!” The pipe draws, and the smoker ought to look happy. He doesn’t. But, then, the sympathetic murmur, with its unguessed import, of Mrs. Eldridge afar, is reaching his ears. Sudden appreciative gushes, and the firm tone of sound advice, are very unsettling when inarticulate. Cannot that fool John be made to throw a light on the mystery? Try again! “Charlotte told you all about it, John; you know she did!” The Christian names give cordiality. But John is not to be cajoled.

“Tellin’s is tellin’s,” says he; and goes so far as to place a finger against one side of his nose, in token of perspicuity. “Put it at stomach! . . . Got the right time?”

“That clock’s right.”

“Then Greenwich is fast. Must see about gettin’ off! Gettin’ off—gettin’ off—gettin’ off!” Mr. Eldridge’s repetitions no doubt have some bearing on his relations with his fellow-man, but it is not easy to say what. They seem to sanction concurrent event; that is the most one can say. He continued his last repetition even after he had taken his leave, saying he wouldn’t wait for Lotty, *because* she was going the other way, and seeming quite content with his speech-work.

Hence, when Lotty reappeared hurriedly, and was surprised at his departure, having something she *must* say to him before he went, Challis got very little speech of the lady. All her limited time allowed her to say was that she had had a long talk with dear Marianne, and she was quite sure “it” would be all right now. Only she was convinced it would be so much better to say nothing to her—just to take no notice of “it” and let “it” drop. However, rush she must, or she would never catch John! And rush she did. And Challis grunted, but retired to his own room, and was soon absorbed in the Ostrogoths.

A stand-up fight between Titus and his wife at this period might have saved the situation. It would not have mattered one straw whether it had turned on Grosvenor Square or on the unsolved mystery of the photograph. Anything that led to fiery outspeech would have been a precursor of reconciliation.

It is difficult to tell anything with certainty about any love-affairs. Nobody ever knows anything at all about them ; even the two constituents, if called on to explain and analyse themselves, make but a poor show. We know pretty well what the Poet is good for at a pinch. And as for the Man of the World and the Man in the Street—well !—all we can say is, give us the Woman of the World or the Woman in the Street ; preferably the latter. But the duty of the story, in reference to the psychology of Challis's two marriages, is to tell what has come to light, or seems most probable—what it thinks or believes, not knows, about the depths of an unfathomable ocean.

Challis, then, being a young man irreligiously brought up—that is to say, made to understand that he was responsible for his behaviour, and that no attempt to shift his sins off on other shoulders would be held fair play—found himself at five-and-twenty in a position that would have been a sore trial to the strongest fortitude. He was, if not actually left in charge of a friend's recently married wife, at any rate in her close confidence ; and, after her return to a home and friends from whom her marriage was a secret, the sole depository of that secret. He might never have fallen in love with Kate had they met on fair ground. But a youth unfamiliar with girl-kind that is not of his own belongings—sisters, to wit, and cousins earmarked as sisters—is always in danger if even a moderately pretty or attractive outsider takes him into her confidence. Challis's danger was all the greater owing to his terror of being treacherous to his friend. Perhaps, if the avowal of his passion had been legitimately possible, he might never have suspected himself of any passion to avow. But when you believe your conscience will brand you as a traitor to all eternity if you pursue a particular course, you naturally want to pursue it.



So it was a great relief to him when a letter, shown to him alone by the terrified girl, disclosed the atrocious deception that had been practised on her, and the miserable position in which she was placed. No wonder the avowal came. Our own belief is that it would have come, exactly the same, to a girl of almost any personality. Nothing could have averted it, short of a hare-lip, an isolated projecting tusk, or—suppose we say—onions. And this girl had pretty lips, and the interview occurred after tea.

Information is scanty about what followed. But no serious inquiry can have been made into the truth of Mr. Horne's accusation against himself. The exact nature of it—the particular illegality he appealed to in support of his case—does not come to light. There really was no one to inquire, except Challis, unless the whole story had come out. It did not. A twelvemonth later Kate exchanged the name of Verrall—whether rightly or wrongly borne—for that of Challis, and two years later Master Bob was born, and his poor little mother had died of him. He showed no compunction, but kicked and made a horrible noise.

His father was only reasonably overwhelmed by his loss. It may be that, like many another inexperienced youth, he had not reckoned with the difficulties this world's Bobs and their like are apt to inflict on their family before they are formally enrolled in it, especially when the mothers they select have nervous temperaments. Challis felt, when he was left alone with the baby, that he had had a fierce tussle with Fate, and had come out of it severely punished. Probably, if his wife had survived, and Bob had lived to be a year old, without alarms about another brother or sister, his father would have been much less easily reconciled to his widowhood. He would then have had a short draught of the nectar of life at its best; that is, if—as we suppose—a tempestuous excitability, which appeared two or three months after marriage, was entirely due to Master Bob. Mental unsoundness seems to have been denied; but, then, surely some one must have affirmed it?

As it was, Bob did a good deal—the best he could—to make up for the mischief he had done. He was a satis-

faction to his father ; and, being taken in hand by his Aunt Marianne, then a girl of eighteen, and in a sense adopted by her, became a strong connecting link between the two, and was really the agency that brought about Challis's second marriage four or five years later. It would have happened sooner, no doubt, but for the anomalous and grotesque condition of English Law, which, till a year or so since, made certain marriages diversely legal in different portions of the British Empire. The Angels might weep, but if they cried their eyes out it would still remain impossible for a man to wed with his deceased wife's sister on certain square yards of it. He had to be domiciled in a special portion of the Empire on which the sun never sets to do that, and yet live ungrundied. Marianne was slow to give in on the point. She had, in common with many of her countrywomen, a religious conviction—a belief in the plenary inspiration of any book in a religious binding—you know the sort. She may have had others, but the qualifications of her intelligence were not such as to enable bystanders to discover their exact nature. Alfred Challis certainly never did so. And this religious conviction did not give way until her brother-in-law deliberately wrote formal proposals to a Miss Bax, with elbows, whom she hated ; to a fascinating young Jewish widow, who had lawlessly said she would just as soon marry a Gentile as a Jew ; and to the daughter of a Unitarian minister. He took the three letters to her, and said : “ Now, Polly Anne, which is it to be ? You may burn two of these ; the other one I post.” Polly Anne promptly destroyed the two last ; her brother-in-law was blasphemous and impious enough already without that, she said. But Emma Bax ! —no, when she came to think of it, it was impossible ! However, Challis directed the letter and, as it were, invested a postage-stamp in intimidation ; so there was nothing for it but to throw her arms round his neck and surrender at discretion. Anything rather than Emma Bax ! He kissed her tears away, and said : “ You know, Polly Anne, after all, you're only poor Kate's half-sister, when all's said and done !” This she found very consolatory.

It was a pity, at this juncture, that the girl's mother was a fool. Had she been a reasonably good guardian for



her daughter, she would at least have insisted on the nuptials being celebrated in a land where the marriage would have been held lawful. But she contented herself with condemning the union in the abstract, and flinging Holy Writ—also in the abstract—at its perpetrators. The Bench of Bishops would have done the same, no doubt ; but that Bench would have forbidden the banns, to a certainty. As she remained silent, and no outsider could be expected to screw himself up to prohibition-point in the case of a half-sister, the pair were wedded by a priest who knew nothing of them beyond their bare names, and never really became man and wife, as they would have done if they had been married sixty-odd years before ; unless, indeed, some busybody had obtained a decree annulling the marriage—as the Law, with a keen sense of fun, directed in the days of our great-grandfathers.

The notable point in the psychology of these two marriages surely is that in neither case was the bride the free selection of the bridegroom, except in the sense that he was absolutely free to take or leave either. He never, strictly speaking, fell in love at all. He found himself in a well, and love trickled in. But even in this metaphor he never was over head and ears. He never wished to be a glove on any hand, to press any cheek. To call him passionately in love with either of the two sisters would have been just as absurd as to say that Romeo “ got very fond ” of Rosaline and Juliet. Exchange the phrases, and each fits its place. Challis got very fond of both his wives, being an affectionate sort of chap. But he remained a stranger to the divine intoxication which is known in its fulness only to Romeo and his like, and which some men never know at all.

Short of this last sort may often be found men who have escaped Romeo’s experience early in life, yet whom some cunning context of circumstance may just upset, and convert for the moment into idiots as infatuated as the young Montague and Capulet we have cried over so many a time. For our own part, we count none quite safe from what is really an ennobling phase of sheer madness ; except it be for instance, a Charles the Second, a Rochester, a Tiberius, or a Joe Smith. *Id genus omne* is safe enough.

## CHAPTER XXIII

MR. ELPHINSTONE, responsible for No. 101, Grosvenor Square, and the morals and dignity of the family that dwelt in it, was not without uneasiness about the literary and artistic circles that his two young ladies had elected to move in. This description is superficial; it judges from externals. Say that Mr. Elphinstone's appearance conveyed that he, like Atlas, had the whole house on his shoulders—was practically answerable for the honourable repute of all his subordinates, and morally for that of his superiors. That was the construction Alfred Challis felt obliged to put on such flawless shaving; such a weighty deference to the slightest personalities—his own, for instance—on production of adequate credentials; such a hypnotic suggestion of having foregone an episcopate elsewhere to take service with a beloved family whose interests he had at heart. It was a construction not free from the derision Mr. Challis was in the habit of meting out to dignitaries of all sorts. In this case he may not have been free from personal feeling; for he must have been aware that Elphinstone regarded him as an interloper—one who outraged the sacred traditions of the household, calling at unearthly hours in a soft felt hat, and smoking on the doorstep until compelled to throw away too much cigar by hearing that the family was at home.

This is substantially what was happening about two hours after Mr. Eldridge had declined to shed any light on anything at all, and his wife had departed enjoining silence about Heaven-knows-what. Challis, *désœuvré* by the mystification, had found himself unable to invent any single thing a Scythian mercenary would have been likely to say in English blank verse, and an approach towards Marianne of a conciliatory sort was met by, "I must see Steptoe now about the dinner." Unfortunately, this speech was



absolutely passionless ; if it had only been tempersome, there might have been a row. And a row—as the Press delights to phrase it—might have spelt salvation. But Challis could see in it nothing that justified more than a languid “All right !” on his part. And he had departed to the banks of the Danube again, with no better success than before.

Presently his wife knocked at his door in an excluded, ostracised sort of way, and he got up to open it. She was dressed for going out. “I won’t disturb you,” she said. “Don’t come out. I only wanted to say that if the man comes about the gas you had better see him, because he won’t believe Steptoe, and the meter is certainly out of order. That’s all.”

It was one of those queer little turning-points of existence. Challis was not ready with any reply that would have caused a moment’s delay and saved the situation. Before he could manage more than general assent, Marianne was gone, too far for anything short of demonstrative recall. He did not see his way to this, and the chance was lost.

He was unable to work, and wanted to go out. But he had been, as it were, put in bond on account of the gas-man, who wouldn’t believe. He failed to console himself by an accusation of Sadduceeism against that functionary, and repeated Blake—

“The bat that flits at close of eve  
Comes from the brain that won’t believe ”

—without benefit to his ill-temper. Then he impatiently wrote a note about the meter to leave with Steptoe, to whom he said with immovable gravity : “Is it a Sapphic or an Alcaic meter, do you know ?” Aunt Stingy’s reply, without a shadow of suspicion in her voice, “I could not say, myself, sir, but The Man would be sure to know,” put him in a much better humour. He actually chuckled as soon as he was sure the good woman was out of hearing.

He wanted a book from the London Library, and could get it easily and come back to lunch. He really did not admit to himself, when he left home, that he had any good grounds for suspecting that he meant to call in Grosvenor Square to inquire about that sprained ankle. He took pains to disbelieve in any such intention till he had got

the volume he was in want of from the Library, and then it occurred to him that it would be unfeeling not to inquire after the victim of an accident which might prove serious, after all. His image of the injury done became very bad as he told his cabman to drive to 101, Grosvenor Square. Was he aware that he welcomed this solicitude about the sprained ankle because it disguised, for the comfort of his conscience, his disposition to call upon its owner ?

The only palliative to the disgust of that doorstep in Grosvenor Square—to which it is time to return—was that this time Mr. Challis was not actually smoking on its brink ; as, when his cab pulled up, he was descried, before he had time to descend, by Mr. Elphinstone himself, who had come out tentatively into the Universe to look round at it, with a sense upon him of possible sudden retractation through the open door, like a hermit-crab. A Piccadilly hansom, equal to bespoke for Royalty, had in this case levelled its occupant up. Even so a growler of the deepest dye, lurching, springless, effluvial, knacker-destined as to its horse, drags down the noblest blood that dares to ride in it—yes ! even a Duke's ; but who can cite a case in point ? Only, when Mr. Elphinstone crossed the pavement, he did it to confer with the contents of the cab, as such ; not with Mr. Alfred Challis, thank you !

He was reassuring about the ankle ; a slight strain that with care—his own and Sir Rhyscombe Edison's—would disappear in a day or two. Oh no !—in answer to inquiry—Miss Arkroyd had not been compelled to keep her bed ; a phrase that entered a respectful protest against “ stop in bed,” the coarse, familiar expression Mr. Challis had made use of. But he was, after all, a married man with a family, so it might be overlooked, this once. He went on to say that Miss Arkroyd, he believed, was up, though nursing the injured limb on a sofa. He arrived, after responsible doubts, at the conclusion that he might send Mr. Challis's card up, in case of any message. Delicacy dictating a female emissary, Samuel was despatched with it to Miss Arkroyd's maid ; who presently, being an unpolished sample from the dairy at Royd, came down and said briefly that Mr. Challis was to come up. Mr. Elphinstone's expression was well-restrained protest.



But it may not have been so much the little dairymaiden's bluntness that provoked it, as an indescribably small shade of demeanour of Mr. Challis's. As the girl came along the passage, and before she spoke, Challis threw his cigar away, or the two-thirds that was left of it. Such a little matter! But unless he had known what she was going to say, he surely would have kept it till he did, to finish at leisure. How came he to be so positive?

Anyhow, there it was!—the cigar—not half smoked, on the pavement when the house door closed. And the cabman's eye rested on it. And he spoke thus to a butcher's boy, who appeared from an area: "Wipe your fingers on your apron, young dripping, and just hand me up that cigar, and I'll see if I'll smoke it. I ain't proud. Only don't you discharge off any of your natural grease upon it!"

To be addressed, even in disparaging terms, by such a hansom, was flattering to this butcher-boy's vanity, and he did not resent it. "Licked, but not busted, that I can see!" was his comment as he handed the cigar up to the cabman, who went on with it, contentedly.

It is two months of the story since it saw, or rather heard of, Miss Arkroyd and Mr. Challis driving up to this door after midnight in another hansom. All that it said, or implied, at that time amounted to little more than that a not very strait-laced lady and gentleman had been rather free and easy over some theatrical schemes interesting to both, and that the lady's sister, being less free or less easy, had intimated that the conduct of the two might be laced a little more straitly, with advantage. It is over six months of the story since they discussed "The Spendthrift's Legacy" and "Ziz" in the garden at Royd. If Charlotte Eldridge, as an authority, had been asked; "On which of these two occasions, madam, should you suppose the chances were best of this gentleman and lady supplying you with a story made to your hand, akin to the one Robert Browning never went on with?" what would her answer have been?

Our own impression is that at this present date of writing, when Challis, smelling rather strongly of tobacco, is following the little ex-dairymaid up the second flight of stairs to what is known as the young ladies' sitting-room—at this

very moment, with the cabman making the most of his inherited Havana, and Judith forming to receive visitors, the position would have been much less likely to supply copy for Mrs. Eldridge than the previous one, but for one thing. Challis's relations with Marianne were, at the moment—say—of the parroquets, intact. What were they now ? . . .

They were *something*, or Challis's last unspoken speech to himself on the stairs would not have been, "At any rate, it isn't my fault!" It needed the atmosphere of Judith—amused, if irritated, at her absurdity in getting a sprained ankle—to enable him to shake free—though always under protest—of the Hermitage.

"Wasn't it ridiculous of me ! . . . No !—don't sit there ; I can't see you. . . . Wasn't it ridiculous of me to do this—just now of all times in the year ?"

"I thought you were a passive agent. I mean I didn't know that you *did* do anything."

"No more I did ! No more than one does. You know what I mean ?"

"Couldn't be better expressed ! Like when one chokes and thinks one could have helped it, and what a fool one is ! But how did it happen ?"

"Perfectly simple ! I was getting down out of the carriage, and forgot to think about my feet. Fenton Arkroyd was passing, and if he's not taken notice of he's sensitive, because he married a laundress, or something. So I forgot to think about my feet. It might have been so easily avoided—with a little common-sense."

"So might so many things." Challis isn't the least clear how the common-sense would act in the cases he is talking at—the plagues that beset his own path. But what a capital thing to say !—on general grounds, of course, with a little esoteric meaning all to oneself.

Judith, perhaps, thinks it too early in the morning for ethics, as she changes the conversation. "How did you like my little maid ?" she says, keeping her eyes closed ; which seems absurd after stipulating for visibility on Challis's part. But it all belongs to a certain imperious humour in the grain of her character. And rights of translation are reserved. She can open them if she pleases.



"She's new, isn't she? Jolly little party!" Thus Challis.

"You're not warm enough! Didn't you want to kiss her?"

"Yes, badly—when she gave your message—half-way up. . . ."

Judith opened her eyes. You can't laugh with your eyes shut; you snigger. "She really gave it? Do tell me exactly! What did she say?" she asks delightedly, keeping her eyes open to hear the answer.

"She turned round on the landing, and became for the moment a mere mass of blooming conscience. . . ."

"Is that—excuse me!—to be taken as *language*, or how?"

"No, no!—literally . . . Blown flowers of intense truthfulness, and buds on the burst. . . . Well!—she *said*, as near as I remember: 'Miss Arkroyd said if Mr. Challis didn't smell too strong of smoke, only Mr. Elphinstone wasn't to hear.' And then she got away up the second flight with some alacrity. I thought she was afraid I might propose investigation, and Elphinstone was still in the neighbourhood."

Judith is intensely amused. "I shall have to give that child one of Sibyl's bead necklaces. Turquoise. It goes with her eyes exactly—they have just the violet tinge." She closed her own again on the slight subject, but it has suggested a weightier one. "Couldn't you give Estrild a little Visigoth *ingénue*—I mean Ostrogoth—to wait upon her?"

"What!—and train the little Rankshire beauty to the part? Think of her parents—the stage!—merciful Heaven! . . ." But Challis stops suddenly, discomposed by a discomposure in his hearer.

"Never mind," says she, shaking it off. "You didn't mean it. You're forgiven! Go on."

"I naturally didn't think of it from that point of view. The cases are so entirely different."

"Never mind!" Judith repeats her words with more emphasis. "You *are* forgiven. Now go on about the Ostrogoths."

"I could put the little beauty in; she would be very

useful as a set-off to Estrild. Besides, I want to get rid of Isarnes the Cappadocian, and she would work in . . .”

Judith interrupts him, calling to the little attendant, who comes in answer from somewhere within hearing. “Child !” she says—“bring me that hand-mirror off my dressing-table,” and when it comes, continues, interrupting a recommencement of the Cappadocian, “That’s right !—give it me. Now put your face over my shoulder and look in.”

The order is complied with, but an inexplicable apology follows : “Please, miss, I know. Because I looked. And I’ve tried monkey-soap, and it won’t wash out.” The seriousness of the young voice is heart-rending. Judith bursts out laughing, but consoles : “It wasn’t that, child ! But I like you to be a funny little goose, so don’t stop ! Now take away the glass, and let the monkey-soap alone, for Heaven’s sake ! . . . You got a good view, Mr. Dramatist ? . . . Well !—you saw what I mean. Now, tell me what you were saying about the Cappadocian.”

“Why, you see, he ought to make a showy end, after dyeing his hands in the blood of so many inoffensive persons, and killing a Sarmatian bison with a single blow in the arena. He might be just giving a hideous laugh of triumph, and his innocent victim might be struggling vainly in the grasp of a giant—it would be Jack Potter ; you know what a biceps he has—and a sudden arrow would be shot from across the Danube and pierce his brain through the eye. . . .”

“Of course—shot by What’s-his-name ?—the man that wouldn’t embrace Christianity, but does heroic deeds. You know, Challis, you’ll have to make him embrace Christianity. What is the use of being unpopular ?”

“Of course he embraces Christianity in the end. The high-priest or bishop elevates a crucifix. I’ve been trying to think of a good name for him. Ingomar or Anthrax. . . .”

“That won’t do. It’s what the sheep die of. How would Zero do ?”

“Something between Zeno and Nero. Very good name, only the thermometer’s been beforehand with us. . . .” And so the conversation ran on for a little, throwing an interesting light on the human drama in its connection with Gibbon. But it was a conversation that murmured con-



tinually : " You know you did not allow me to go my own way because you thought I was going to be disagreeable. Finish me piecemeal as I arise, or take the consequence—misgiving on either part about what the other did or didn't think." Judith, who, after all, was the one responsible for the discontinuity, gave in to these murmurs first, and harked back.

" I know you think, Challis, that I am keeping the *madre* and *papa* in the dark about what I mean to do. But I'm not, because Sibyl knows, and *they* can know perfectly well if they like ; it's only that they don't choose to know. Besides, what on earth *is* the use of making scenes, when I've made up my mind ? I'll confess when the time comes."

The levity or laxity of Challis's voice is gone from it in his reply, scarcely a sequel to the words just spoken : " When I said that about your little maid, I had no thought that it could possibly apply in your case. The child, remember, is under the legal control of her parents. How old is she ?—sixteen ? . . ."

" Yes, perhaps—not more, certainly. You mean that I'm . . ."

" Over twenty-one. I don't say you would assert a legal independence against the wishes of your family. But it separates the two cases. I wouldn't have any hand in getting a very young girl on the stage in any case. And I think I should avail myself of the existing legal . . . well !—call it pretext, if you will . . . to excuse myself from doing so."

" That's just like you, Challis ! You really are a disciple of Mr. Brownrigg's Groschenbauer—what's his name ? You deride every existing usage, merely because it exists, and then you make use of it for your own purposes ! You're just the same about the parsons, and all religion ! You tolerate it, or pose as tolerating it, because you dislike wickedness on the whole, and can't see your way to a substitute—not even to a Metaphysical Check."

Challis's laugh left his face twinkling with paradoxical intention. " I believe I am the only known example," said he deliberately, " of a person apparently of sound mind who has never once succeeded in justifying a single position he has taken up. . . ."

"Don't talk like Felixthorpe! At any rate, you can justify the position you have taken up that I'm more than twenty-one."

"Because you told me!"

"Yes—the day after my birthday. I was twenty-six the day you came to Royd. I remember telling you the day we went to the Rectory. Six months ago! Oh dear!—how the time does run away!"

In obedience to a mysterious law, which dictates that no speech of any good-looking woman to any passable man shall mean to him nothing beyond its obvious meaning, this little reminiscence of Judith assumed an identity. It reminded Challis of the existence of that soul-brush, which had become—it is useless to deny it—so much a part of his relation with Judith that he had ceased to hear the machinery. *He* denied it, mind you!—denied it systematically. Yet he was indignant with anything that reminded him that it was time to deny it. Plague take this necessity for walking guardedly! How acceptable it would have been to be able to say, "*How* we enjoyed that walk back through the sunset!" Another type of man—the type that says, "Let Charlotte Eldridge do her worst, and be blowed!"—would have had no scruples on the subject. But Challis was a nervous person, and his Self was perplexing him—very especially now, with poor, dear, stupid Polly Anne making life a weariness, with her tempers and her fancies.

Was Judith Arkroyd aware, all the time, that this man's bark was in troubled waters, while she was floating in a secure haven—secure, at least, for now? Did she ask herself any questions?

Or was Challis just a shade priggish to show a stony front to such a very meek little reminiscence? His actual reply was: "I thought it was a good deal more, since my visit to Royd, I mean."

"I hope you'll pay us another visit." Judith thought to herself that two could play that game. And Challis immediately felt chilly, illogically; rather as though the soul-brush had slacked off. He would have to say something serious now, to merge this little fault in the stratification of their conversation.]



"I hope to, certainly. Well!—what were we saying? . . . Oh yes!—you told me your age, you know. But even then I had misgivings about Aminta Torrington. I can't say I wasn't glad when old Magnus put his foot down. It's an odious part, and it wouldn't have suited you. Thyrsa Shreckenbaum won't look so well on the stage, but it's more her part than yours."

"I should have thought Estrild was wicked enough for anything."

"So she is. But it's mediæval—good, honest, outrageous atrocity. It's almost Scriptural. Suppose, now, you had to apologize to the papa of your little tire-maiden for putting her on the stage, think how much easier it would be if she was only to play Messalina or Lucrezia Borgia than if it was Frou-frou, for instance!"

"That little sugar-plum—just fancy! No, I shouldn't like her to play Frou-frou at all. The atmosphere is purer in the other cases. How ridiculous one is! But point your moral, Mr. Dramatist."

"Let me see!—what are we talking about?" For Challis had forgotten. "I believe I'm on a line of self-justification. Didn't I tell you I never succeeded? I believe I'm creeping round to a sneaking apology for having offered you Aminta Torrington at all. I wouldn't have written the part for you—even then. But there it was, and you asked for the chance, and it was the only thing I had to offer."

Judith's laugh rang out. She had a capital stage laugh, musical but penetrating. "Nobody's finding fault with you, stupid man! But why 'even then'? It's not four months since. Where is the difference? She had opened her eyes full on him to laugh at him, and now closed them again to wait for an answer. Had Challis been at his best, observing nature with a view to copy, he would have noticed that last time she laughed—about the sugar-plum's message—she had left her eyes open, full flash on him.

But he was too busy with a difficulty to do his duty by human nature, that it behoved him to know, like Peter Ronsard. That unfortunate "even then" that he had blundered out had brought him face to face with a fact that—so it struck him now—he had never felt properly

ashamed of. How came it that, up to this moment, he had scarcely seen in it a matter to be ashamed of at all ; and now, almost involuntarily, he had drawn a distinction between *now* and *then* that seemed to place Judith Arkroyd *then* on a lower level ? It was actually true that three months ago he was trying for all he was worth to negotiate this girl into the good graces of his stage Jupiter ; to get her on the boards to represent a woman whose wickedness he had specially invented, thereby to fall into the fashion of a time that he himself accounted an age of stark fools. For he had never come across an Aminta Torrington ; but he conceived, for all that, when he put her on the stage, and set Mr. Guppy and Dick Swiveller off being up-to-date about her, that he was performing his part in the dance—the dance of fools ! He felt he was in difficulties, and even for a moment contemplated an appeal to the Artist's Love for his Work, as an excuse for his own attempt to get the help of Judith's beauty for his *corps dramatique*. He hesitated, negatived it, and said to himself uncandidly that—thank God !—he had not fallen as low as that. But he never suspected, as this story has begun to do, that his sense of shame was due to the fact that this lady had become less cheap to him in these three months—dangerously less.

But he could not leave that “Why *even then* ?” unanswered, with his questioner waiting there behind her closed eyelids for whatever excuse he might see his way to. *Why even then ?* He felt he was flushing a little, and hoped she would not open her eyes. But his speech hung fire too long ; and when they turned on him suddenly to see what it was going to be, he was caught, and could only see his way out through frankness. “I know,” he said—“I know. Of course, I was wrong to suggest it. Still, it was the only thing that came to hand. It was either that or nothing. And you wished it . . . and besides . . .”

“I am not blaming you. Go on . . . ‘and besides’ . . .” The beautiful eyes that were to make so much mischief on the Danube were almost cruel in the way they waited for what Challis felt he had better not have begun to say.

But there was no help for it now. He had to continue, and did so : “ . . . And besides, I did not know you so well



as I do now . . . I mean, I saw the thing differently. . . .” He was getting deeper and deeper in the mire, and the eyes showed no signs of letting him off. “No ; it’s no use,” he said abruptly. “I did wrong. But then, can you understand me ?—how could I know it was *you* ?” Then he made a weak attempt to *dispersonalise* his words. “No one of us remains the same.” And then, feeling he wasn’t shining, settled to hold his tongue. But he did not look Judith in the face over it.

She, for her part, being perfectly collected and thoroughly mistress of herself, only saw in his confusion a clear token that she was also mistress of the situation. She had done this sort of thing before—love of power being always her chief incentive—and had come out scathless. If a doubt now crossed her mind that she might be playing with edged tools, it was not strong enough to stop her.

“How true that is ! Do you know, Challis”—please note this habit of address ; it has somehow become natural to Judith—“I was thinking only just now, before you came in, how completely you have changed your identity since those days. Do you remember when we played chess ? . . . Well, I’m almost ashamed to tell you how I thought of you then. . . .”

“You owe it me. See how I’ve been at the confessional myself !” Challis submits to the soul-brush without protest. It is no use. Why resist ?

“You were merely an author whose works I hadn’t read—yes !—that’s true ; authors never have any idea what a lot of people haven’t read their books. I thought you would just come and go, like the rest of them. But I fancied you seemed at a loose end, and I would take pity on you. I never thought . . .”

“Never thought what ?”

“Don’t look so *empressé* over it, Challis !” Really, this woman’s faculty for going close to precipices, foot-sure, is something perfectly marvellous. Tenderness outright seemed the only natural sequel just now. But she will get back to safety, after gazing coolly over the edge. Trust her ! “I couldn’t say it all in one word, you see . . . Never thought that in six months you would be writing a tragedy for me to play in. That’s all that it comes to. At any

rate, you seemed quite a different person then.” Had she recoiled too abruptly from the precipice? Is there slight concession, just to accommodate a working equilibrium, in her last words? Her own working equilibrium, mind you!—in which to dangle her victim over that precipice at leisure, and yet to keep able to deny its proximity undisturbed, or pooh-pooh it altogether, at choice. For a thorough-paced female flirt enjoys driving her quarry mad best, when she knows she has plausible innocent unconsciousness enough left in the cellar to quench\* any fever of self-accusation of her own. “Who ever said a word, or thought a thought, about love-making? . . .” Don’t we know the sort of thing?

Challis’s own frame of mind—for the story must needs try to define it, however difficult it is to deal with—was one of a sort of thankfulness that he had perturbation of feeling all to himself. Therein lay his safety; he could keep it secret. He could and would pay for it by additional tenderness to poor dear Polly Anne—who *was* Polly Anne, after all, mind you!—when this last stupid bit of purposeless quarrelsomeness should have cleared away. But he wanted security that the conflagration whose smouldering he could not disguise from himself would be local. He had just, only just, stamped out a spark that might have become a flame at that precipice-edge, now a moment since. He was willing to go great lengths in persuading himself that there were no fires smouldering elsewhere; for to what end, in Heaven’s name, should he recognise them?

But suppose he should be forced to! Suppose he should find one day that he could no longer parade before his mind this creed that was his security—this impossibility that he was ever present in his absence to this woman; as he had to confess perforce, struggle as he might against growing conviction, she was so often—nearly always—present to him. He built this faith upon a rock of friendship, genial and firm, but always cold, that an exaggerated respect for her character—which really did him honour—chose to assign as the only leasehold her heart could accommodate him with. Perhaps unfounded hallucinations about the beauty of Judith’s character were the most



dangerous features of the disease Alfred Challis was sickening for, if it had not developed already.

All this may seem too many words about a simple thing. Perhaps Sibyl's way of disposing of the subject was more intelligible—saved trouble, certainly. "That man admires you too much, Judith, for it to be safe to play tricks with him. You'll do this sort of thing once too often. And then you'll be sorry." However, it was clear that there could be no real danger as long as the lady remained detached, and very little as long as the gentleman was convinced that she was so.

And he may have been so convinced—one would have said—when he found himself able to answer Judith with a philosophical, "Have you ever known a new acquaintance not to change completely in the first six months?" And she may have thought he was running too much to abstractions when she said, "I did not say you had changed completely"; as though she would not have him suppose her too unconcerned. He was not to slip from the web she was weaving round him by a device of gossipy discussion. Her remark just met the case; and the soul-brush, which had got a little out of gear, got to work again.

They went back to the tragedy, and talked of it so long that at length it came to measuring the minutes by his watch. Then Judith said to him, as though she had but just recollected it: "You found my letter, I suppose?" No, he had not—had she written? Oh yes!—it was posted last thing last night. There was nothing in it, or she would have spoken about it. The fact that she had written lubricated that soul-brush. But he must go, or he would be late. A few more words, mostly about how last night's entertainment had missed her presence, and the lady the Ross Tarbets had brought in her stead had proved a failure, and then Challis was standing beside her to say adieu—her hand in his. Really inevitable, if you think of it, on the supposition that the forms of civilisation are to continue to hold good.

It was a perversity of Fate that chose this very moment for the only other frequenter of that room to open the door unheard. Judith could not see her sister through Challis as he stood there. He turned to go.

"Oh, Mr. Challis. I did not see it was you. Perhaps you are talking business. Don't let me disturb you."

"Not at all. I am just going."

"Stop one minute, Mr. Challis." Thus Judith. "Never mind Sibyl! You *must* try to persuade Mrs. Challis to come and see us. Now promise you will!" She had not referred to Marianne before, by the way.

"I'll try what I can do. But my wife goes her own way. Good-bye! Good-bye, Miss Sibyl!"

"How long had he been here?"

"Over an hour. I can't say exactly. You must ask Elphinstone when he came, if you want to know."

"It doesn't matter to me when he came."

"You asked." Sibyl made no reply. A lunch-gong sounded below, and she vanished, but presently returned.

"You are not coming down to lunch?" she said. "At least, are you? Or not?"

"Of course not! How could I, without flying in Sir Rhyscombe's face?"

But Sibyl's question had been mere conversation-making, or skirmish-seeking. She said what she meant directly after. "I suppose it's perfectly useless *my* saying anything. But you know what I think."

"I know what you think, dear! Go to lunch."

"Very well, Judith!" And Sibyl departed for lunch as Judith sounded her bell for her little handmaid, the reputed sugar-plum.

"How long will it take you to get to Wimbledon?" Challis asked the driver of the waiting cab.

"A tidy long time, the rate I'm going now!" was the reply. "Jump in!" Challis, feeling he was in the hands of a master-mind, obeyed without question, and the cab was off, at speed. Presently the master-mind said briefly, through his orifice above—as King Solomon may have spoken to the evil djinn he bottled—"Within the hour," and closed it on his fare for that period. The djinn was in for a lifer, and was immortal; so thought Challis to himself. That was too long, but short of that, something over an hour would not be unwelcome—just to think things over a little!



## CHAPTER XXIV

IF King Solomon's captive had gone on scheming conciliatory attitudes through all eternity, he would probably have failed to hit upon the right one at the end of it, from mere want of presence of mind. Even the short "Within the hour" of Challis's cabman was a little too long for his fare to think things over in safety, without a risk of the things tripping one another up. He conceived a very good deportment to suit his return, based on sorrow for being so late, and then began to complicate it with considerations whether he should at once enquire more particulars about Marianne's alleged—and denied—indisposition of last night, or let it alone. Also, should he confess up at once where he had spent most of the morning, or let *that* alone! Perhaps that letter of Judith's that he would find on arriving would help matters. Yes, it would! He pictured himself to himself—as an actor in the concurrent drama of Life that he always made notes of by the way—saying, "Oh yes! That's nothing!—only about the play. I saw Miss Arkroyd for a few minutes this morning. You know, she was kept away last night by a sprained ankle, so I went to enquire. Hm-hm-hm!" He went the length of supplying the sound of reading a letter to himself, and threw its imaginary pieces, when he had torn it up, to show how unimportant it was, into an image of a waste-paper basket. Then he turned round, that actor, and kissed his wife, who had recovered her temper. And then all went well in that play, and that actor told himself not to be a damned idiot about a fashionable beauty, who knew he was a married man with a family, and hadn't the slightest idea that—well?—that anything!

That was the play. The reality did not work out so comfortably. Challis was in time for lunch, as the cabman was as good as his word. "Fifty-six and a half," said he,

looking at his watch ; and added, in a comfortable sort of way, "Make it up eight shillings," as one who felt he really deserved the extra half-crown or so. He had a pleasant, engaging manner with the opposite sex, this cabman, saying to Harmood, when she brought him his money out : "Don't you get married without letting me know, my dear ! My old woman, she might get sick of me any minute !" But Miss Harmood was accustomed to admiration.

Mrs. Challis had left word not to wait lunch, said the young lady, returning undisturbed. Also, there was a note to say, with the letters—that is, to wit, with the postal accumulations. Challis, opening it, found a bald and severe statement that the writer was going to Tulse Hill, and might be late. Marianne's mother's domicile was always spoken of as Tulse Hill. Challis knew that this mother and daughter were seldom on cordial terms except when he was in disgrace with both, and it did not tend to allay the feeling of irritated mystification that came back now to Challis, with quickened memory of the events of the morning, that his wife should have pitched on this particular moment for a visit to Tulse Hill. She really seldom went to see her mother, for she was very lazy. But—and this was a big *but*—she *always* went to see her when there had been dissensions. So much so that when at any time Challis found that she had gone to Tulse Hill, his tendency was to look back through the last twenty-four hours to discover what skirmish was responsible for the visit.

This time he was completely baffled. His wife knew perfectly well that she had been invited—cordially invited—to this last night's entertainment. Did all this mean that in the end he would have to give up associating with the outer world, and restrict himself to John Eldridge and Lewis Smithson ? That seemed the only programme compatible with the enjoyment of a comfortable home. Only for God's sake let it be formulated ! Let him know what he had to expect, and Challis would put his sign-manual to any reasonable treaty. . . . He stopped suddenly, yet asked himself—why stop ? Then, knowing well that he dared not answer his own question, flinched off the subject.



This phase of reflection did not come immediately on opening Marianne's note. He had passed through a brief epoch of lunch for himself and dinner for Bob and Cat and Emmie since then. It had been a riotous but not unpleasant experience, and Challis was grateful for it. Bob's greeting to him had been, exactly transcribed: "Mater's gone to Tulse Hill. I say!—if you were to give me five shillings, I could buy a phonograph, because I've saved up fifteen. Tommy Eldridge has got one that does a menagerie, and you can hear a man having his head bit off." This felt jolly and cheerful, especially as the two little girls jumped with eagerness to hear the subsidy voted. Imitations of insubordinate wild beasts, and the sounds incidental to detaching a Bengal tiger from his prey with red-hot irons, made lunch pass pleasantly, and Challis felt much happier. He granted the five shillings on condition that no operatic records should be purchased. He had heard "Voi che sapete" through a gramophone once, and he knew!

He was in his study, and Bob had probably nearly arrived at the phonograph local plague-centre in Putney, when he got to speculation, acknowledged as such, about a *modus vivendi* for himself and the mother of those two little wenches. He denied Judith any place in the problem, preferring to recognise, as the sole difficulty he had to fight against, the attitude of Marianne towards what he summed up as "Grosvenor Square," compendiously. He refused to admit that the class of feelings he entertained towards that lady—or might have entertained; he wouldn't quite admit them—could possibly come under discussion so long as he kept them to himself. Why, if every trifling vibration of personal feeling, every grain of salt on the dish of a man's friendship for a woman, was to be made the foundation of an indictment of faithlessness to his wife, where would matrimony be? But he nearly lost the thread of his reflections in the obligation to define what the feelings were that he was refusing to admit.

He would not allow for a moment that these feelings could possibly interfere with his affection for his wife. In fact, he actually shouted "Nonsense!" aloud in answer to some accusation to that effect for which he was not responsible.

So loud, in fact, that Harmood came, and said, "Did you call, sir," and disbelieved the "No, *I* didn't!" that she was met with. He would not have felt foolish on hearing his own voice getting out of bounds, but he did when it came home to him that Harmood must have heard him two rooms off at least. This would never do. He would get back to the Ostrogoths. How about Estrild's little hand-maiden?—a good name for her?—something ending in *illa*? Favilla?—Scintilla?—Yes, that would do, without the *S*; otherwise, like Law Courts and tittles of evidence! Yes—certainly Cintilla! But he got no further.

Because the little sugarplum brought back his interview of the morning. There was Judith again—he had nearly given up thinking of her as Miss Arkroyd—holding the mirror at arm's-length to make it include both faces easily, watching the *ensemble* with a slightly Ostrogothic effect, sympathetically resumed from some passage in the play she had half read, and knew the purport of; eyelids thrown up as per instructions of stage-trainer, to secure the glare which seems to have come so freely on the faces of all our forbears whom the Stage has thought worthy of portrayal; just a hint of what upper lip and nostrils could do, if they tried, in the way of callousness towards tortured prisoners. For Judith had been thinking over the part. And how grand her eyes were, too!—something of the dark colour of sapphires by artificial light. And the little chick's face had come so well! That episode of the monkey-soap had produced a *nuance* of terror-stroke; exactly how Cintilla would have looked over a Christian martyrdom; a penalty deserved by a Dissenter, but alarming, for all that. He would tell Judith next time he wrote. . . . Well!—he *would* write, of course. But it was all in the way of business. What of that? . . . He would tell her he had christened the child Cintilla. She would call her Cintilla now; he was sure of it. . . . Now he must get to work! This would never do.

He actually did get to work this time. He wrote blank verse, or prose abstract to turn into blank verse, or other blank verse that was better than the first blank verse; or, if worse, could be rejected when found wanting. But the worst was when alternatives turned out equal—impossible



to make choice of. After a while he found himself with two such samples to choose between. Which speech of the two would come best from the lips of Estrild? He had to acknowledge that he was puzzled.

And yet a good deal might depend on it. He was wavering between two courses in the plot of the play. Each of these speeches seemed to point to one. Suppose he chose the one that, afterwards, Judith liked least, and followed on the line of plot that suited it! He would not feel happy over it, that way. Obviously, Judith was the proper person to decide. Master Bob might just as well carry the speeches to a handy typewriter at Putney, wait for them to be executed, and bring them back. Or stop! Challis knew he could rely on the accuracy of this typist, at a pinch. Why not write to Judith, leaving the envelope open, and let Master Bob put the typed copy in and post it? It would save a deal of time. Then he would be able to get on with the play first thing in the morning if an answer came by the early post, as it might. He could mention Cintilla, too.

So said, so done! Master Bob was off like a shot, though reluctant to leave his phono, whose hideous din had been audible from afar since its arrival an hour ago. No sooner was he past recall than Challis remembered that if he had decided the question himself, it never would have been necessary to show the rejected version to Judith at all! But the fact is he had got rather into the way of consulting her. Anyhow, it couldn't matter much, either way. He went back to his writing, and found something else to go on with. He went on with it peacefully until a cab arrived, and he looked out, expecting that it was Marianne. It was not, and he had an odd sensation of being glad he was sorry it was not. He saw who the visitor was, and retired.

Confound that woman! Why on earth need Charlotte Eldridge come bothering in when Marianne was away? A confirmatory announcement is followed by, "Oh, Mrs. Eldridge!—Did you *tell* her your mistress wasn't here?" Thus Challis to Harmood, who checks the incorrectness of his speech. "I said Mrs. Challis was not at home, sir. Mrs. Eldridge said she would come in and wait." On which

Challis's comment—too much to himself to rank as an answer—is, "She'll have to wait."

"Am I to tell her so, sir?" Harmood, docile and well-bred, awaits instructions.

"No!—don't tell her anything. Perhaps your mistress will be in soon."

Challis made a show, for his own satisfaction, of going on with his work—but not for very long. As tea-time drew near, he looked at his watch, and decided not to have tea in the drawing-room with his visitor, but to go out. So, when he looked in on Charlotte for a moment, he was in walking trim, and merely shook hands hurriedly, and said: "Marianne must be in soon. She'll never stay to dine at Tulse Hill. I have to go. Ring the bell for tea, and make Harmood attend to you properly. Ta-ta!" and departed, affecting haste.

Mrs. Eldridge was not quite ready for tea, and also hoped Mrs. Challis would reappear shortly. So she postponed summoning the handmaiden, and took Challis's old novel, "The Spendthrift's Legacy," from the bookshelves, wishing to compare the portrait of his first wife, which she knew it contained, with current events. As she speculated over this and that, an unmistakable boy's head—that first wife's boy's—came in at the door, and said "Hullo!" in a very uncompromising way. It was merely greeting—no more!

"Well, Master Bob, where have you been? Come in and talk, and shut the door."

"Haven't got much time for talk. I say! I wonder if you can hear up here. We've got such a ripping phonograph."

"I can hear beautifully." Indeed, a woe-begone and God-forgotten croak has been audible for some minutes, rendering patter-songs. Bob warms to his subject: "Isn't it awfully jolly? You're really sure you can hear, though? I say, though, isn't it a pity? I got 'Movement in A flat,' and I might have had 'The White-Eyed Musical Kaffir,' and it's such rot. Harmood says she's sure it's only music—like pianos."

"Why don't you open it and see?"

"Because then they won't change it. I might have



changed it when I was out, if I'd known. But I thought it was a row in a house, and furniture getting broke, don't you know?" He gives further particulars of his misapprehension, but it will be as clear as it needs to be without them.

"Where did you go when you were out?" Mrs. Eldridge seems strangely unconcerned about the phonograph. But Bob is too high in the seventh heaven about it to conceive it possible that such indifference should exist. He takes his hearer's sympathy for granted, and as for suspecting any non-phonographic motives in his questioner—impossible!

"Putney. I could have gone to the shop twice over in the time I was waiting."

"What were you waiting for?"

"Typewriter. For the governor. Oh—quite half-an-hour!"

"What a shame! And you wasted all that time waiting. But you got what you went for? I mean your father got his typewriting?"

"No fear!" This with scorn. Then, to keep the heaven of veracity spotless: "*He* didn't get it, you know. I shoved it in her envelope, and shoved it in the pillar-box in High Street. Not the one near the tobacconist's."

"Whose envelope?"

"It was all right. There wasn't any other. Judith's. I say—are you quite sure you can hear up here? Hadn't I better bring it up, while you have tea?" For tea is coming of its own accord, audibly, outside the door.

"No—after tea. I shall listen better. Whose letter did you say you put in? Judith's?—who's Judith?"

"Oh—you know! Me and Cat always call her Judith. Miss *Arkroyd*." There is a trace of contempt, quite unexplained, in the accent on the first syllable. But Bob will be lenient, adding, "But she gave me my skates." Then, for he cannot honestly conceal a defect, "She's duchessy, for all that. A hundred-and-one, Grosvenor Square, W." And leaves her, classified.

Should Harmood make the tea? Not on Mrs. Eldridge's account, certainly! Mrs. Challis was sure to be back. Too probably, in practice, for either speaker to say "D.V." about it. But no atheism was meant—far from it! Har-

mood attended to the fire ; enough just to keep it in, although if it went on like this we should soon be able to do without. And the water couldn't go off the boil as long as there was ever so little methyated. Mrs. Eldridge was beginning to fear that there *was* ever so little, and that the boil's hour was come ; and was questioning whether it would not be better on the whole to make tea in order that its getting cold should favour Marianne's return, when a cab-sound recommended itself to her notice for some unexplained reason, and she began making the tea. She really wished to see Mrs. Challis, having a card in her hand she wanted to play. One fights against a misdeal when one has seen the ace of trumps in one's hand. But let us be just to Mrs. Charlotte. Of course, it was well understood, between her and her conscience, that her motive was to make sure that no mischief came of that letter to Miss Arkroyd. Suppose that young monkey were to say he posted the letter, and say nothing about the palliative type-writing ! And then suppose Alfred never thought it worth mentioning that he had written at all. Quite a case for a judicious friend, etc., etc. Oh, these meddlers !

The cab *was* Mrs. Challis—not literally ; only household *patois*—and Mrs. Challis was sorry she was so late, Charlotte. Why had that lady not had tea ? Marianne's manner was dry and hard. No—she was not the least tired, she said. She would go up and take her things off and come down immediately. She threw out a skirmisher to stop that horrible noise on her way up ; and when she returned, if peace did not exactly reign where Bob was, somewhere below, at any rate the sounds that continued were human, not diabolical.

“ Well ? ” Mrs. Eldridge spoke first.

“ Wait till I've had some tea, and I'll tell you.” A cup apiece elapsed, and then Marianne said briefly : “ Says it's a parcel of lies. If poor Kate had been married, she *must* have known.”

Charlotte considered. The detective character asserted itself. “ How does she account for Mrs. Steptoe knowing the name of these Hallock people ? ”

“ She doesn't account for it.”

“ What does she suppose her motive to be ? ”



"She doesn't suppose."

"Even if she knew the name, it's impossible to believe she would trump up such a story! With nothing to gain by it, Marianne dear, with nothing to gain by it!"

"I didn't say I did believe it. I only told you what mamma said."

A conversation that flags from lack of any visible step forward welcomes another cup of tea, to pause on. After a measure of silence, so filled out, consciousness of the *impasse* brought in a new element, as stimulus.

"I talked to John about it."

"Why must you talk to John?"

"My dear Marianne! Well!—John's a fool, I know, but I have a great respect for his judgment, sometimes. I shouldn't have begun about it myself. But he was there when Mrs. Steptoe was looking at the photographs, and he spoke of it to me. . . . What did he speak of? Oh—the whole thing!"

"What did he say?"

"It wasn't so much what he *said*. You know his way. He only said that a party he knew in the City knew a man in a Private Inquiry Office, and that sort of thing always ran into money. So his idea was—you know how funnily he phrases things?—his idea was that 'keep it snug' was the word. In fact, he repeated it several times. John's habit of repetition gets rather irritating, now and then."

"Did he say nothing else?"

"I don't think he did. . . . oh yes!—he exonerated your husband. At least, he said that that sort of trap wasn't the sort of trap anyone would suspect Titus of being up to. It was a little obscure, but John is obscure."

Marianne showed no disposition to take an interest in John's opinions, even assuming them to be capable of recasting in an intelligible form. She sat holding her teacup, as one anxious not to break with a pleasant memory. But her face was not pleasant for all that. It might be unfair to say it had a set jaw and a scowl, because that suggests a prizefighter without a prize. But accept as much of the description as leaves an image of a comely woman with dark hair—plenty of it—in a plait, and rather

*embonpoint* for thirty. Put in the mole we have spoken of, just on the cheekbone ; but don't run away with the idea that there must be a styne in the eye on the other side, that you are not looking at. Let Marianne have all that is left of a bonny robust girlhood that was in its day rather more acceptable—consciously so—to her brother-in-law than the more delicate approach to beauty of his deceased wife. But Marianne had gone off, too ; there was no doubt of it. Nevertheless—and in spite of occasional acerbity and frequent sullenness—her husband loyally cherished the idea that she was good with a deep-buried goodness, a quality that might be relied on when the hour of trial came, a rock-bed of sound-heartedness, to build on even when appearances suggested earthquake.

Some such appearance may have made Mrs. Eldridge cautious about pursuing the thread of John's judgments, as she joined in her friend's silence beyond her usual habit—a loquacious one. Presently she said, to relieve the monotony, “ Shall I put your cup down ? ” and took it with a well-formed hand she was vain of—indeed, it ran close to beauty—from one that was rather a defect in its owner ; too chubby, too accented at the rings, to be redeemed by a mere addendum of filbert-nailed fingers.

Marianne then said, as she surrendered the cup : “ You saw him before he went out ? ” She spoke as though she took her companion's knowledge of the contents of her own silence for granted.

Mrs. Eldridge seemed to acquiesce. “ He looked in for a moment,” she said.

“ I suppose he got his letter.” This was mainly thinking aloud, for how could Charlotte know anything about his letter ? She could guess, though, and was not slow over it.

“ I suppose so, because he answered it.” Then she may have felt that her knowing so much without data might seem unwarranted ; for she added : “ At least, if it was a letter from her,” and then explanatorily, in response to an inquiring look, “ Yes !—Judith Arkroyd, of course.” She probably had no definitely mischievous motive in the phrasing of this. The assumption that any “ her ” must be Miss Arkroyd only showed what she herself had been thinking of. But it teemed with suggestion of continuous



correspondence between the lady and gentleman in hand. Marianne flushed angrily, far more moved by the way in which she heard of it than by the mere letter itself. It was only one of many letters, after all !

“ How do you know ? How can you tell ? ”

“ Marianne dear—really ! ”

“ Really what ? No, Charlotte, you’re nonsensical. Of course it was her ! Why *do* you take a pleasure in mystifying me ? Can’t you tell me what you mean ? How do you know he answered it ? ”

“ Dear, if you’ll be patient, I’ll tell you. But, really, you do make so much out of nothing . . . it’s all about *nothing*.” And, indeed, Mrs. Eldridge looked frightened, as a mischief-maker may whose hobby has got the bit in its teeth.

“ If it’s nothing, at least you can tell me what it is.” And Marianne, who a moment since was red, now goes white, with hands just restless and a foot that taps uneasily. There had been nothing in antecedent circumstance to warrant so much excitement. So thinks Mrs. Charlotte, and would like to hark back, and make her mischief gradually, on congenial safe lines. A row would be premature, to her thinking.

“ What *what* is, Marianne dear ? ” she says. But then makes concession : “ Only, of course, dear, I know what you *mean*. How did *I* come to know about the letter he sent her ? It’s quite simple. . . . ”

“ Well—go on ! ”

“ . . . It was Bob. He was in here just now, and told me his father had sent him to post a letter to Judith—that’s what the young monkey calls her—and then you asked if he had got his letter. Of course, I thought it *must* be from her.”

“ Why ? ”

“ Oh, nonsense *why*, Marianne dear ! How *could* it be anyone else ? ” And Mrs. Challis cannot answer this, naturally, as she knows quite well it was Judith’s handwriting alone that attracted her attention to the letter, and that there were at least a dozen other items by the same post. Charlotte continued : “ I can see nothing to make such a fuss about. With this play-acting going on, a letter might be anything.”

“How do you know I thought it wasn’t anything?”

“I dare say you didn’t, dear. Of course, one takes for granted that one’s husband . . . well!—even if it was John, it would never occur to me. And look at the difference between my John and your Titus!”

As it is impossible to fathom Mrs. Eldridge’s motive for ascribing the character of Lovelace to the chosen of her affections, the attempt shall not be made. Some things begin, exist, and cease, and none knows why. But one may conjecture. Was it that Charlotte wanted a certificate to her understanding—from experience—of Man the Baboon that she sometimes sketched St. Martin’s-le-Grand and the Royal Exchange as a sort of ilex groves furnished with Mænads and Bassarids, all for the delectation of respectable Satyrs with stove-pipe hats or billy-cocks, each in his degree? Like Nicholas Poussin, you know! Yes—that was it! John’s character had to be sacrificed, to show through what slant or squint in a side-aisle his wife had got a glance at the mystic altar of the Bona Dea.

But Marianne was not prepared to accept the view suggested. “One man’s the same as another,” said she. Then, with an access of feeling that she was being entangled in something, she knew not what, that she was not clever enough to escape from, “I wish you wouldn’t talk like this, Charlotte. I hate it!”

“Talk like what, dear?” says Charlotte, but adds illogically, “It wasn’t me began talking like this. It was you said, how did I know he answered it? I could only tell you.”

“I don’t care what who said, or anyone. It’s nothing to do with it. You know what you’re trying to make out, so where is the use of pretending?” Mrs. Eldridge interjects, “What am I trying to make out?” But this is ignored, and Marianne continues, “And you know you’re wrong and the thing’s ridiculous.” Through all this runs a tacit acceptance of the existence of “the thing.” But it remains undefined, by mutual consent.

At this point Mrs. Eldridge began to suspect that Marianne was showing more tension of feeling than the case, as known to her, seemed to call for. She must find out, in the interests of the drama she wanted to enjoy—for, of



course, true mischief-maker that she was, she never admitted that mischief was her motive—what had passed at Tulse Hill to account for her friend's *accès* of asperity. Because of course it was that! It was that horrid old woman.

"I suppose you talked it all over with your dear mother, Marianne?"

"There wasn't anything to talk over with my dear mother that I know of. Yes, I did—I talked over what you mean."

"And she agreed with me, I'm sure?"

"I don't know whether she did or didn't, and I don't know what "agree" means. But I do know that I won't talk to Mamma again, neither about this or anything else unless . . ."

"Unless what?"

"If she talks as she does. She knows, because I told her."

"Don't tell me about it, dear, if you don't like." With which licence to silence Mrs. Eldridge settles down to the hearing of a good long tale, which she knows will have to be elicited by jerks, as Marianne is profoundly Anglo-Saxon—not a drop of Celtic blood in her veins. It comes, and, summed up, amounts to this:

Marianne had carefully avoided saying a single word at Tulse Hill about "it"—in fact, had wanted to keep Grosvenor Square out of the conversation altogether. She had really only spoken about Mrs. Steptoe's story and the photographs, and how "it" came in Heaven only knew. But there "it" was, and mamma had been very disagreeable about it, and said things. What things? Oh, of course the sort of things she always said . . . well!—about her own marriage with Titus, and the Deceased Wife's Sister business. Just as if she, Marianne to wit, wasn't only poor Kate's half-sister—and it just made all the difference! But what did she say? Well, it seemed that she had up and denounced, in the most positive way, about how she had always said, and always should say, that the Blessing of God could never rest on an Unscriptural Union. And then, being pressed to develop this thesis, had fallen back feebly on the position that "we were told" it was Sinful, and that Marianne knew where just as well as she did; which was indeed true in a sense, for neither of them knew anything of theology, or divinity,

or exegesis, except that the Bible was the Word of God, and contained everything necessary to Salvation, as well as to the fostering of all our little particular prejudices. In fact, it would have been difficult to light upon any two completer agnostics, etymologically, than this mother and daughter. So, though the former was happily unconscious of the whereabouts of any texts bearing on the question, she was convinced of their existence; only making this much concession to her daughter's position—that the marriage of a man with a half-sister-in-law was only half as bad as with the complete article. It was a Venial Sin, and a commodious one thus far, that it still permitted intercourse under protest between a daughter who had committed it and a mother who went to church.

On this occasion, when the admixture of foreign matter into the discussion had raised the question of possible nuptial infidelities, the old lady had embittered her criticism of her daughter's position by pointing out that Titus might do whatever he liked, and she would never be able to get a divorce, like a legally married woman. The knot that had never been tied could never be untied, clearly; and one of the great advantages of conformity to established usage was hopelessly lost. This view had fairly enraged Marianne, who had fought for her right to a divorce as the tigress fights for her young. Not to be a wife at all according to the law of the land was bad enough, but if you had to forego your birthright to be a legal *divorcée* or *divorceuse*, whatever were we coming to?

"I must ask John how that is," said John's wife, really to make talk, for she was at the moment weighing the question whether this item in Marianne's recent collision with her dear mother was enough to account for her ill-temper. "You would never suppose John knew anything at all, by his manner; but it's wonderful what he does know. There he is!" There he was, and there also was Mr. Challis, who had met him on his way from the station, and told him he believed Charlotte was at the Hermitage, and he had better come in. And there also was a Mrs. Parminter, or Westrop—Marianne wasn't sure which—who had really wanted to leave a card and cease, only Titus had gone and asked her in, and now Marianne supposed we should have to be civil.



Do not suppose this Mrs. Parminter or Westrop has nothing to do with the story. She will go out of it, certainly, very soon ; because she has promised to be at the Spurrells' at six, and it takes a full quarter of an hour. But she has an influence on it, by the spell of her presence acting on the social *rappports* of the household. Briefly, we all know it's quite different when there are people ; and this Mrs. Parminter or Westrop was quite as much people, *ad hoc*, as if she had been the Spurrells.

When there are people, you assume a genial smile, and affect a crisp alacrity of interest you do not feel in their loves or their sheep, or even their digestions. You shout ; so do they. Then some one else shouts louder, and you try to finish what you were shouting. But you don't succeed, and perhaps you give in ; and then your family—lady-wife, mother, sister, what not !—says afterwards, need you have been so glum, and couldn't you have exerted yourself to make things *go* a little ? And you're sorry, because it's too late now, and the Mrs. Parminter or Westrop of your case, or your particular Spurrells, have trooped away with parting benedictions, and left the hush of daily life behind. And then your family lady looks at the cards the Mrs. Parminter or Westrop has deposited, and sees which of the two she is, and says she thought so.

All this happened in the present case, the Mrs. Parminter or Westrop having swept Mr. and Mrs. Eldridge away in her vortex, because they were going in the same direction ; and having said to them what a delightful call she had had, and what delightful people the Challises were ! To which Mr. Eldridge had appended a note to the effect that he had known Challis quite a long time, now you came to think of it. And the equivocal lady had said dear her !—how very interesting !

The genial wooden smile, as of the visited, on the faces of Marianne and her husband died abruptly as its cause became a distant shout. It gave place to a mere puzzled look on his, provoked, no doubt, by the expression of cold fatigue on hers and her silence. So far as he could recollect there was nothing to account for this—at least, at the date of their last parting. The interview about the gas-man was unleavened with tenderness, certainly, but then it

was the merest household colloquy. But, to be sure, there had been Tulse Hill since then ! That was it !—it was that horrid old woman ! So it was just as well to say nothing. Challis said it, and went to get ready for dinner.

“ Getting ready ” amounted to little more than washing his face and hands. It could not interfere with mental schemes for approaching and conciliating his wife. He really wanted to do so, for he knew in his inmost heart that he had more than once this day turned angrily against suppositions that *would* present themselves—hypothetical readjustments of his life, always with Judith Arkroyd sooner or later working into them through a mist of the honour in which he held Marianne. Suppose—oh, suppose !—all his life had been different ! Suppose he had known her in her girlhood, this Judith ! He had let the image he had formed of the self he would have been, had all been otherwise—just for one moment he had let it hunger for the hand, the lips, the eyes of this hypothetical girlhood. It seemed so slight a wrong to grant himself that luxury, when by hypothesis he was then never to have seen or spoken to either of his wives of the time to come. But the moment he had recognised the nature of this supposition he had flung it from him, as he had others of a like sort. Just so the watcher, sworn not to sleep, believes himself awake even as the spell seizes him ; then strikes hard to slay the coming dream, and is awake again. Alfred Challis had been secretly guilty of this particular dream, was angry with himself for it, and was scheming now to lay some stress on his affection for his living wife. He knew enough from long experience of Tulse Hill to ascribe to it powers of producing an even greater severity of deportment than Marianne’s at this moment.

He judged it best “ not to be too previous,” and went from his own dressing-room straight to the drawing-room. That would make the best job. He felt obliged to John Eldridge for this expression of his.

Marianne followed in due course, and appeared in conflict with a preoccupying wrist-button. His proposed arrangement was to say, “ Well, Polly Anne, now let’s hear all about it ! ” And she spoiled it with, “ Stop one moment. I must get Harmood to do this for me.”



A new departure became necessary. But it would not be half so *dégagé*. A certain amount of spontaneity would have to be surrendered. Try again !

"Got it right now ?" Yes—that was best !—not to go outside current event.

"What—the button ? Oh yes, it's right enough ! At least, it'll do." And then dinner, according to Harmood, was on the table, and the button lapsed.

"Did you find your mother well ?" This followed on the heels of soup, concluded. By this time Challis had given up all his little conciliations, and was drifting, a mere log on the current of matrimony. Oh yes !—Marianne had found Mamma well—that is, just as usual. She wasn't going to help, evidently. However, he would try yet again, but presently. Presently did not come, apparently, till cigar-time. Then he made a more vigorous attempt. "Well, Polly Anne, I think you might ask me where *I've* been."

"Where *have* you been ?" The amount of concession there was in this was just sufficient to make it impossible to indict the conversation as unendurable, and demand improvement or silence ; but not enough to pave the way to cordiality.

Challis would probably not have ventured on his last attempt if he had had nothing to report but his visit to Grosvenor Square. But his afternoon excursion, later, had given him confidence. He was able to answer that he had looked in to tea at the Ponsonby-Smiths', or whatever the name was ; and what did Polly Anne think ?—Celia Ponsonby-Smith had got twins.

"Celia Robinson, I suppose you mean," said Marianne coldly. "I saw it in the *Telegraph*. Did you go nowhere else ?"

"In the morning—yes ! I went for a book to the London Library, and made a call. Nowhere else this afternoon."

"I meant in the morning. Don't spill your coffee. The cup's too full."

"No—it's all right. There !" Challis reduced his coffee to safety-point, and was not ungrateful for the slight break in the conversation. He was able to affect

a balked readiness to speak, as one whose swallowed coffee has left him free to say the words it interrupted.

"I called in at Grosvenor Square."

"I see." This is a simple speech enough, but if the *I* lasts a long time and the *S* even longer, it expresses diabolical insight. Yet one can say nothing. Challis could only ignore it, and continue :

"I told you Judith Arkroyd had had an accident. Or didn't I ?" But he knew quite well ; and Marianne knew he knew, and merely shook her head. He went on : "Well—she has. And she wasn't able to come to the Acropolis last night."

"A bad accident ?" Marianne seems determined to keep her words at the fewest.

"Nothing very serious ! A sprained ankle. She'll have to lie up for it. Not a hanging matter !"

"Of course you didn't see her ?"

"I did. There is nothing to prevent her receiving visitors."

"Was she up ?"

"My dear Marianne ! Of course she was up. What do you suppose ?"

"I don't know. I don't pretend to understand these sort of people. I suppose it's all right, either way." And this lady then withdrew from the conversation, leaving her husband half-nettled and half-apologetic, but quite unable to lay hold of any excuse for expressing either irritation or apology. Especially the latter, because why should he think confessions or apologies necessary ?

Perhaps nothing could throw more light on the way the heads of this household quarrelled—for domestic bliss has many forms—than the internal comment made by its eldest son when he returned by contract at half-past ten from supping with his friend Tommy Eldridge. What Master Bob said to himself, after a short wait for sounds of human voices, was : "*Row* on, I expect. Pater and mater not talking !" He put his head in at the drawing-room door and made a statement. "I say. I'm not late." His father, who understood Master Bob down to the ground, attached the right meaning to "What are you ?" which followed. He looked at his watch. "Ten-thirty-three,"



said he. "Three minutes late! Now go to bed, and leave the phonograph alone till to-morrow."

"What!—not only just one, in the breakfast-room, with the door shut?" But even so conditioned, it is too late for phonographs, and Bob goes to his couch a sadder boy, but as great a goose as ever. Before doing so, he has to give securities that he will not pound about overhead and wake his sisters; and to note that his pater is reading and sorting letters, and his mater has settled down to a book.

You know what that means, especially when the book is bicolunar, microtypical, and there's such a lot to read before it gets to where everyone says it's so improper. You read the first brisk spurt, till you get to the point at which the author's inventive power has flagged, and then you become strangely content to repose underneath that work, with your eyes closed and your hands peacefully folded over your foreground. But Bob was wrong. His mater had not settled down to her book in the true sense of the words, and Challis knew it by the speed at which the leaves turned. Marianne couldn't read at that rate, even without stopping to think of the meaning. And you must, sometimes.

Besides, Challis had glanced at that book himself, and knew his wife would never understand local Americanisms and Indian dialects in Kamschatka. It was an interesting book, though, and Challis remembered how the first chapter began: "Midnight in Nootka Sound, and the blood still dripped monotonously from the shelf above, etc." He was just thinking could he safely venture on asking the reader why this first chapter was called "Hello!" when she put the book aside, and said briefly: "I'm going to bed." She had not spoken a word since Bob's incursion.

Special effort is needed to keep in mind how little Marianne's husband knew of the causes of her perturbation. So far as he could see, the whole ground was covered by illogical resentment against a group of his friends, whose advances to herself—as it seemed to him—she had inexcusably rejected. Still, he could frame excuses for her; it was not for her as it was for him: he had the key of the position. It was a case for compromise, and Mari-

anne was uncompromising. That was all ! As for any conception that a new light thrown on his past had presented him to her as distrustful and secretive—certainly keeping back something she must have a right to know ; possibly, though she hesitated over this, something disgraceful to himself—no such idea crossed his mind for a moment.

It would be all right in the morning ! He had said that many a time overnight, in tiff-times, and peace had followed as predicted. Tulse Hill, considered as an incident, was too recent for any sort of conciliatory effort to be worth making—to-night, at any rate. Let it alone, and have a finishing smoke ! Go back to the Ostrogoths !

Then, as he wondered whether, for all its slow combustion, the grate would not consume its coal before he got through his cigar, there came back to him an image of Judith Arkroyd in a dangerous form—an image in which physical beauty was subordinate to a subtle relationship of soul, which he had imperceptibly slipped into ascribing to his own and hers. A dangerous form, because Love played a new part in it for this man. His first wife had probably been—put it plainly—a mistake ; his second . . . well !—he was very fond of Marianne—very—and they had had many happy times together. But it wasn't quite the same thing as—oh, dear !—well, it couldn't be, you know ! One can't have everything.

Much more dangerous, that sort of thing, to our thinking, than the primitive fascinations of Aphrodite herself ! Indeed, we have sometimes thought that lady didn't go the right way to work in that affair with Adonis. She should have *sympathized* with him. All the same, mind you !—so Cynicism murmurs at our elbow—man has an extraordinary faculty for detecting companion-souls to his own, pulses preordained to beat in unison with his, in bodies of extraordinary beauty, of indisputable grace. *He* may squint, and his eyesight be defective, but his predestined *She*, the mate of his soul, will gaze on him through lustrous orbs of tender radiance. Her voice will reach him through the rosiest of lips, the pearliest of teeth, without so much as one gold stopping ; and all the while there will he be, without a sound tooth in his head to boast of, unless he has the



effrontery to make a parade of his crown-and-bridge treatment. He may even wear a wig, and brazen it out, in the same breath with a protest against a single false tress on the head of his other dearer life-in-life—this comes out of Poetry, somewhere—while as for a Venus Calva . . . simply out of the question, thank you !

Anyhow, the predestined mate of the soul was a much more kittle head of cattle to shoe behind when chosen for her beauty from among the daughters of an aristocracy not celebrated for ugliness, and manipulated by photographers into bestowing their eyes upon the readers of the shiniest print that ever lay on the table of an hotel reading-room.

## CHAPTER XXV

THE Mistake's son was the unfortunate means of causing the next day to begin badly. For he rose early, and hastened to the plague-centre at Putney whence Records flowed, to acquire in exchange for the condemned piece of mere music either "The White-Eyed Musical Kaffir" or something equally juicy. Naturally, he found the shop not open, at an hour when sparse milk and eggs were the only things procurable. "Won't open till ten," was the current opinion. Bob, disgusted, called on his friend Tommy Eldridge, and found sympathy and consolation. Tommy had had the "Musical Kaffir" for two days past, and the Kaffir had palled. He would swop him for the "mere music" record and twopence. Bob closed with the offer, but the bargain had taken time; and, as a consequence, he burst in upon breakfast at half-past eight o'clock, and announced his acquisition with an evident conviction that his hearers had been awaiting his return with suspended breaths. His step-mother—or aunt; either will do—confiscated this treasure promptly, and denounced Science within the home-circle. Lectures, she said truly, were one thing; houses another. Bob cited the indulgences shown to other fellows by their parents in respect of phonographs, and Cat said that Tommy Eldridge always had his till tea-time. Her mother told her not to speak with her mouth full, and met Master Bob's half-inaudible "I shall ask the Governor, anyhow!" with so harsh an enquiry, "What's that you're saying, sir? Don't mumble to yourself!" that Bob evacuated his position, and awaited reinforcements.

Marianne was making the common mistake of easing ill-temper by attacking objects blameless of provoking it—blowing off steam through wrong channels. At another time she would have been too lazy to open a campaign against a phonograph. Now she found it a relief to pitch



in—Bob's phrase—and enlarged her scheme of operations. "If it wasn't for your father," she said, "you would all be breakfasting upstairs." Bob, who was afraid of her because she had boxed his ears for him before now—and not so very long ago—only muttered a *sotto-voce* "I'm a Rugby boy now, and that would be grandmother," expressing in his simple, limited way his sense of acquired status, and the folly of ignoring it. Marianne, who was not really the least angry with Bob, and certainly didn't care twopence about the "Musical Kaffir," saw in this suppressed defiance an outlet for her own high-pressure atmosphere, and jumped at its inaudibility as though it were the head and front of its offending. What was it he was mumbling?—she said again, with growing anger. He wouldn't mumble if his father was here. Bob denied this audibly, probably meaning that he had said nothing he would have scrupled to say to his father. He felt indignant and injured; having, indeed, meant no wrong, though his preoccupation about the glorious phonograph had no doubt made his speech appear careless.

As ill-luck would have it, Challis, coming down at this moment to breakfast, and not in a beaming good-humour himself, heard his wife's indictment, and quickened his descent of the stairs. He resolved at once on his usual policy whenever Marianne came to open warfare with any of the family—namely, to take her part at the moment, for discipline's sake, even supposing he had to make amends for it after by concessions.

"What is the matter?" said he magisterially, in the pause of silence his entry created. It was more impressive than any amount of excitement, and the younger little girl, Emmie, began to cry in a terrified way. Nothing creates the formidable like fear, even when it is only a small child's. The tension became full-blown, having—please observe!—all grown out of nothing.

"You must ask your boy what he means, Alfred, and find for yourself. All I can say is, that if I am to be spoken to so before the servants, I cannot go on."

"How dare you speak to your mother so—eh? What do you mean by it?" Challis's assumption of uncontrollable anger is affectation, merely from motives of

policy. He knows he can make it up with Bob, any time.

"*I didn't.*" Bob no more knows what he is denying than his father knows what he has accused him of. Never mind! Families don't quarrel by the book. Bob is scarlet, for all that, and warms to his subject. "*She* took my Record, and it cost a shilling, and twopence over. *She* wanted to prevent me . . ." But it remains untold, whatever it was, for Marianne interrupts :

"You can hear for yourself how he calls me *she*. But do as you like, Alfred!"—use of this name means a state of siege, observe!—"He is your boy. After which she repeats, "*She, indeed!*" to rub it in.

Challis at once perceived that he must either sacrifice poor Bob on the altar of Peace, or be entangled in a hopeless discussion of rights and wrongs with Marianne; *how* hopeless, only experience such as his could know! Action was necessary, and he pounced on Bob, seizing him by the collar of his coat. "How *dare* you speak so to your mother? How *dare* you . . ." But stop! He could never ask him how he dared say *she* to his mother! Even Marianne would suspect him of making game of her. So he had to pretend that his indignation had overwhelmed him. "Don't answer me, sir," he shouted, shaking the culprit with a severity probably more apparent than real. "Be off to your room directly, and stop there!" And the child that was crying broke into a roar, to do honour to the way the scene had climaxed. Bob vanished.

The roaring slowed down, and was gradually merged in bread-and-marmalade. An intermediate period of sobs and bites, overlapping, was filled out with public discomfort—an embarrassed silence in which Challis's visible vexation was unfairly taken advantage of by Marianne, to say, "You can't wonder at the child, when you're so violent." Challis closed his lips lest he should speak; but it came home to him, in some mysterious way, that he was in the wrong. Men are; or if they are not, it comes to the same thing. For a firm conviction in the mind of a woman with a strong will and a proper spirit has all the force of fact. But Challis's acquiescence in his guilt was accompanied by a growing resolution to take Bob to the play.



*coûte que coute*, before he went back to school on Monday. He had no misgivings about the boy's breakfast. He knew Harmood might be relied on, as Bob was a favourite in that quarter. Probably a compensation-breakfast was in store for Bob, later.

It was a bad moment for dealing with a female correspondent who is "always sincerely yours." Had Challis been confident that an unopened letter on the table was from one who was only "his faithfully"—though, indeed, Rebekah could not have been much more to Isaac—or even "his truly," he might have opened it confidently and made some excuse to throw it carelessly along the table to his wife while he went on to his last consignment of press-clippings. Or he might have done so equally, however "sincerely his" Judith Arkroyd's signature said she was, if only this stupid needless row had not been bred by Mrs. Challis's Short Temper out of Bob's Phonograph. But then, in addition to the sincerity with which Judith surrendered herself for ever, Challis knew the letter would contain a repeat of her invitation of the day before to his wife—probably to accompany him to Royd at Whitsuntide. So he postponed opening all his letters, and made the fatal mistake of hustling them together as though he valued them all alike. Marianne knew better. Had she not seen him pause half a second over that characteristic, unmistakable hand—a strong bold upright script that seemed to speak its contempt in every line for the scratchy Italicisms of its writer's ancestors? How was she to interpret its being packed away out of her sight in this way? However, she wished the jury in the court of her inner conscience to understand distinctly that she did not care one straw what her husband did or did not do in respect of Grosvenor Square—but within well-defined lines. For, apart from the degree to which she relied on the safeguards of that Square's aristocratic pride, she had about her husband the feeling many students of nature ascribe to married folk who are not ripening for divorce—the feeling Geraint had about Enid, according to Tennyson. Marianne, for all her tempersomeness and jealousy, loved and revered Challis too much to dream he could be guilty of anything that would supply copy for a modern novel.

A more frank nature than Marianne's would have said to him when he pocketed his unopened letters, "What!—not read her letter? Well!—*I* wouldn't write again, if I were she!" or some such pleasantry. Her obdurate silence provoked him to say what might else have stopped on his tongue's tip. It came just after the children had vanished to the nursery. "I think, Marianne, considering that the boy is going back to school on Monday, you might have . . . Well!—you might have been a little easier with him."

"I'm sorry he is going back to school; that is where he learns it all. But I expected to be found fault with."

"Learns all what? What does he learn?" But the lady simply bristles with silence in reply to this question, so intensely does it call for no answer. Titus continues, letting it lapse: "I don't think you remember that it was I that gave him the phonograph; at least, I gave him leave to buy it."

"I don't remember anything about it, and I'm not going to try to. Of course you gave it him, to encourage him against me. Very well, Alfred, you take his part! Oh, *I* know!—oh yes, I'm not his mother. But I know what poor Kate would have said, if she had been here now." This was rather a favourite position of Marianne's; only she never by any chance filled out her claim to knowledge of what would have happened under perfectly inconceivable circumstances. She kept details secret.

He thought of replying: "Poor Kate wouldn't be a fool, anyhow!" For he was vexed about Bob. But he was ashamed to find how Time had changed the face of things, that he should actually take exception to his own statement on its merits! Wouldn't she? He wasn't at all sure. He gave it up, and merely said: "We won't talk any more about it now. Where's Bob's Record?"

This was unfortunate. He had better have swept his letters into his pocket, with the hand that was waiting to do it, and carried them off to his study. Instead, he waited for the confiscated Musical Kaffir.

"No—Alfred—it's no use! I won't give it you if Bob's to have it. Horrible noise! Besides, look at the way he's been behaving!"

Challis gets visibly angry, or angrier. "You had much



better give it me, Marianne," he says, reaching out his hand for it. But he just misses it, and it goes into Marianne's pocket; past recovery, without concession on her part or physical force on his. All might have been well if the dispute had not got to this point.

Things being thus, nothing remains for the story but to tell what actually took place. The lady persisted. No, she would *not* give it up! Nothing would induce her. Appeals on moderate lines, to come, to be reasonable, and so on, only made matters worse—tending, in fact, towards admission of weakness on Challis's part. He became more irritated, and in his annoyance at having to give up the point, made an unfortunate speech. "Well—keep it, then, if you're so obstinate. I won't try to take it from you. But I tell you this, Marianne: there are many husbands that would." His only meaning was to lay a little stress on his own forbearance. He would not even try. But his speech sounded like an assertion of male power against female weakness, as well as of legal right.

The last was what stung Marianne. Her recent encounter with her mother had thrown doubts on her right to a divorce. How could they be reconciled with a husband's legal right to confiscate a White-Eyed Musical Kaffir, or any record, for that matter? Her eyes flashed, and she bit her lip as she turned to leave the room. A laugh that was no laugh came of it, but scarcely speech, to speak of. All she said was, "Because they could"—not very intelligibly. And then the nurse, Martha, with some appeal through the just opened door, cut off the interview, and imposed an every-day demeanour on both.

Challis went to his room to cool down. To him his wife's last words were inexplicable, unless they meant that his physique was not his strong point, and that he might not have recaptured the Musical Kaffir so very easily. But that did not seem to ring quite true, neither. Never mind!—he had to look at his letters. After all, it was not the first time Marianne had been unintelligible.

But her exclamation had no relation whatever to what Bob chose to call "*vim*." It was part of the new phase of thought connecting her mother's views about the legitimacy of her own marriage-knot with Challis's suggestion

of a male domination that others—not he—might have legitimately claimed. If she was not to be Titus's lawful wife—if she was to be swindled by a trick of jurisdiction—at least let her have the advantages of her freedom. Let there be no rubbish about a man's right to rule, about a wife's duty to obey. Keep that sort of thing for authenticated marriage-lines, if hers were to be flawed.

It was the vaguest hint of an idea—no more! A gleam not worth a thought, except for what it grew to.

A human creature with an unopened letter in its hand is raw material for an Essay on the Past, Present, and Future. Rather dangerous things for a thoughtful scribbler to touch on rashly! Better say as little about them as possible.

That, or something like it, was Challis's thought as he stood in his writing sanctum, reasonlessly hanging fire over the opening of Judith Arkroyd's letter. Or was it that he wanted time to settle down after the recent *emeute*? Some nervous characters—like his—shrink from a clash of conditions, a discordance of consecutive surroundings, and are prone to let each association die down before another takes its place. Challis wanted to shake clear of his domesticities, maybe, before transferring his thoughts to Judith and the invitation to Royd that he knew her letter would repeat.

For whatever reason, he hung fire. And when in the end he opened the letter, he did it slowly. He took a broad view of it; then placed it on the table while he lighted a pipe, with a misgiving that there was a flaw in it that would prevent his showing it to Marianne. When he picked it up for deliberate revision, smoke-encircled, he found it read thus:

“DEAR MR. CHALLIS,

“Speech A. will suit me best—but never mind that if you feel like deciding on the other. Both enclosed back.

“Remember about Whitsuntide. Only please do succeed in persuading Mrs. Challis to come this time. Shall I come and go down on my knees to her? It does seem such



a shame that she should keep so much in the background. Tell her she *must* come. I leave it to you—but do try !

“ Sincerely yours,  
“ J. A.”

What the dickens possessed Judith—not Miss Arkroyd, please !—to use that unfortunate expression, “ keep so much in the background ” ? Of course, Grosvenor Square is the foreground of the Universe—a little of Challis’s style as an author outcropped here—but why not take it for granted ? Why, in a communication that was to be shown to a fretful porcupine, need Grosvenor Square let the cat of its deep-rooted faith in its position out of the bag of its good-breeding ? That was Challis’s metaphorical standpoint. But really Judith very seldom sinned in this way ; scarcely ever, so Challis persuaded himself, trespassed on Mr. Elphinstone’s department.

Now, why need Mrs. Challis choose this exact moment to remind her husband that his Fire Insurance expired on the twenty-fifth, within fifteen days of which, et cetera ? Why had he left his door on the jar, so that she should look in, unannounced, just as he was deciding that it would never do to show her this letter from Judith ? He had no time to reflect—barely enough to replace it in its envelope. And that, after all, was the worst thing he could do. For Marianne knew the envelope by heart already. The only way of accounting for things of this sort is by imputing to Eblis a conscientious attention to detail. He reaps his reward, as we know, the smallest interventions often yielding a profit. This remark is suggested by Challis’s decision, after his wife had left the room, that the Devil was in it.

Has all this incident of Bob’s phonograph been worth recording ? Certainly it has. Because, coming as it did on the top of Mrs. Steptoe’s reminiscence, and Mrs. Challis’s visit to Tulse Hill, it blocked explanations by supplying reasons for the attitude of that hill—reasons valid enough undoubtedly in the eyes of Mrs. Challis. The phonograph ruction was an effect, not a cause of ill-temper, and poor Bob was really a victim, not a prime mover in it. It did

not matter much to him, for his release was not long delayed, and reinstatement and compensation followed somehow. Besides, his father took him to hear the *Barbiere di Siviglia* before he went back to school. But he refused to admit that Melba was any better than her record would be, if he might only buy it for three bob.

By itself the Steptoe incident might have been explained. So might Challis's correspondence with Judith, or might never have attracted attention. It was the correlation of each to each, and the visit to Tulse Hill, with the subtle touch of Charlotte Eldridge at critical points, that provoked the dissension over the boy's harmless instrument of torture, and gave the Devil his opportunity.

Mrs. Steptoe had never recognised the young man whom she remembered as Harris, who, of course, was Challis himself. But the identification was in the air—bound to be made sooner or later. Although Mrs. Challis kept silence towards her husband, she lost no time in recurring to the subject with Mrs. Steptoe. Her own penetration had gone very little way, but Mrs. Eldridge had not been behindhand in finding out that either Kate Verrall had been thrice married, or that the second husband of the Brighton story was Challis himself. Charlotte would not have made a bad female detective. “Don't be a goose!” said she to her bewildered friend. “Don't give the woman any hints. Show her an old photograph of your husband, and see if she doesn't recognise it.” Marianne did so, and it was straightway identified as that young Mr. Harris. “But,” said she, “that is Mr. Challis, before we were married.” Aunt Stingy, completely taken aback for a moment, recovered herself with great presence of mind, and laid claim to having said many things she never had said the first minute she set eyes on Mr. Challis. In a very little while she persuaded herself she had known him at once. But she could not be induced to admit that she had got the name wrong; and as it was quite unimportant that she should do so, both ladies agreed to leave her unconvinced.

Mrs. Eldridge's suggestion was made at her own semi-detached residence, a quarter of an hour's walk from the Hermitage, where she and Marianne were reviewing the



position some days after "it" occurred. The latter had been dwelling on a suggestion of her mother's, a very stupid old woman, that her husband had been, and still was, ignorant of poor Kate's first marriage.

"Absolutely impossible, dear!" said the authority. "Thing couldn't be! Besides, she would have had to be twice a widow, in such a very short time, if this young man Harris wasn't your husband. He *must* have been." And then she added her detective suggestion, as recorded, and the result removed all chance of acquittal on this score.

## CHAPTER XXVI

THAT Whitsuntide the may-trees were thick with bloom at Royd when Marianne Challis once for all flatly decided not to accompany her husband there. As for him, he couldn't possibly refuse to go merely because she wouldn't. And when you particularly want to do anything, intrinsic impossibility to refuse to do it is always welcome. So on an early day in June Challis found himself again on the lawn at Royd ; not exactly breathing freely because Marianne had refused to join the party, but distinctly glad that he was not called on to speculate as to what she would have said or done in this contingency or that, or which of the guests she would have fallen out with, or the extent to which he would have been bound to try to lubricate the situation, or the exact nature of the mess he would have made of it. Marianne had decided the matter, in spite of *bona fide* efforts on his part to reverse her decision. He had made them *bona fide*, in the interest of his conscience later on.

Anyhow, that was all settled, and he could inhale the aroma of the may-trees and the lilacs, and identify the note of the wood-pigeon—he was just bucolic enough for that—and pretend he meant blackbird when he said nightingale, and, in short, betray his Cockney origin *ad libitum*, while basking on the lawn in the first enjoyment of his escape from the hoots and shrieks and petroleum-stench of town. For even Wimbledon Common is not exempt. And nowhere can the music and the silence—strange compound !—of the world of growing trees go home more strongly to the jaded sense of a mere town-rat than in the charmed circle of a park-girt home, with centuries of repose behind and possible decades of conservation ahead. Not too many, because that would savour of sentimentalism ; and it is always our duty to be prosaic



in the interests of an advancing Civilisation. Not too many, in this case of Royd, because that would imply too great a delay in the development of the wealth of coal that is known to exist below the beech and cedar of the three-mile drive, and the woods of ash and oak the deer and the keepers have pretty nearly kept to themselves since the days of William the Socialist. And when the coal comes, what that means in the end is—heaps more people! Never mind what sort! Don't bother!

Don't bother! That was Alfred Challis's view of the Universe in two words as he settled down to the enjoyment of faultless afternoon tea, which would be a little stronger presently for those who waited; of the society of his hostess, the Rector, and two of the previous chits; of whom one, the young soldier's idol of last September, was drawling with sweetness, but without interest, to oblige. She was looking frequently towards the house. Challis said to himself that she need not be uneasy, because *he* would come, all right enough, in due time. He knew this, because they had ridden from Euston together, and talked about tobacco the whole way, that being their only topic in common. When the young man appeared, with the visible benediction on his head of two ivory-backed hair-brushes with no handles—which Challis had seen when a dressing-case was opened in the train for a moment—the young lady received him ceremoniously, almost distantly. Never mind!—thought the author to himself—they'll be romping like school-children the minute we oldsters are turned off.

There was no one else yet, of all a large house-party; nearly the same as in September, said Lady Arkroyd. She apologized for this to Mr. Challis, who replied that he, too, was nearly the same as in September, if not quite, and that it was a coincidence. He hoped his identity would be as welcome to the house-party as its would be to him. Lady Arkroyd smiled acquiescence without analysis. She remained gracefully on the surface of things, confident that all would go well below it in the hands, for instance, of an eminent, if sometimes puzzling novelist. Lady Arkroyd had not the insight of Judith, Challis perceived. He indulged a disposition to detect insight in

Judith. *Geist* in that quarter made their relation—not that they had any, mind you!—plausible and warrantable.

There may have been concession to some such relativity in her ladyship's remark that Judith would not be back till dinner. Challis fell flat over it, not knowing whether he ought to say, "Cheer up!—I can wait," or shed tears. Athelstan Taylor relieved the position by saying that he hoped Miss Arkroyd had stopped on her way at the Rectory, as he wanted her to see the little girl. Then her ladyship bestowed on Challis, for a snack, as it were, the odd chit, who was at a loose end; devised her to him by name, and went back to a talk on local games at Providence with the Rector. The chit's name, however improbable it may seem, was Lady Henrietta Mounttullibardine, and she did not look as if she could live up to it. She coloured at intervals, and seemed hushed. Challis distinctly saw her want to say something several times, and give it up. He encouraged her tenderly, and in time she confessed that she really wanted to know whether it was *Pepperstraw*, in Challis's last novel, that hit upon the idea of using *digitalis*, or *Bessie*. He told her, and she retired on her information, in awe at having spoken to a live author. Challis could listen undisturbed to the conversation of the Parson and their hostess.

"There is something very engaging about the child," said the latter. "Of course, she has that defect. The mouth is too large for beauty. But she cossets up to you nicely, and opens her eyes wide. The eyes are fine in themselves, and remind me of... oh dear!—what was that girl's name, now, in Somersetshire? I can't recollect the least." Athelstan Taylor felt helpless, and was wondering if it would be legitimate to say never mind, when her ladyship decided that it didn't matter, and continued: "Sir Murgatroyd is quite of our opinion, that it would never do to let the child lapse."

"Never do at all!" said the Rector. "Indeed, even if the child were not there, I should be very reluctant to lose sight of the father. I suspect, too, that the people at the cottage—where I put him to stay, you know—wouldn't thank me for taking him away. It's very curious to me how a man with such qualifications for being an encum-



brance can manage to make himself welcome at all. But he's become very popular there, especially with old Margy. She says it's like a clock to hear him tell. I think she means that he goes on chatting in a pleasant, easy kind of way. Sea stories, you know—that sort of thing!”

“Didn't you say he was inclined to give trouble?—they *are* troublesome sometimes.” She referred, no doubt, to the *intransigent* pauper population, and their natural love of independence combined with outdoor relief.

“I didn't mean exactly troublesome in that sense. Troublesomely averse to giving trouble, perhaps I should have said. He never said anything to me, but old Margy is in his confidence. It seems that that sister of his—the Steptoe woman, you know? . . . oh yes!—*you* know—the woman whose husband was drowned in the lock—the *delirium tremens* man . . .”

“*Delirium tremens* man?” said her ladyship dimly. And then suddenly, “Oh yes, I know, of course,” almost in one word. Challis listened with stimulated attention, and Mr. Taylor continued:

“Well!—she's Jim Coupland's sister, you see—and it seems that she used to twit him with eating the bread of idleness before he took to the retail match-trade. He considers that he is eating the bread of idleness now. Perhaps he is. But he is submitting, until he is strong on his legs again—that's his expression. Besides, we have made a composition, and half his keep is to be deducted from his savings. By-the-bye . . .” The Rector paused, with recollection on his face.

Lady Arkroyd's speech is apt to have a superseding character—to pass by lesser folks' unimportant remarks. “I liked the father at the Hospital,” she says indifferently. “I hope the child isn't going to be delicate.” Mr. Taylor was arrested long enough to say, oh dear no!—oh no, it was or would be all right as far as that went—and then left it, whatever it was, to finish his own beginning.

“I was just going to say what an odd chance it was that Mr. Challis's housekeeping should have absorbed Mrs. Steptoe. How does the woman answer, Challis?” For, as we have heard, these two gentlemen had become fairly well acquainted last September, in spite of the cloth

of the one and the predispositions of the other—a better word for the case than “antipathies,” which had almost crept into the text. One or two country-walk chats had ended in Challis giving the Rev. Athelstan practical absolution for his black stock and silk waistcoat, and the latter reflecting much on the figments of mediæval creed and formulary that make a gulf between so many intellects with concord at the root, and play into the hands of their common enemy, the Devil. Why was he glad that his friend Gus was safe in London dabbling in incense, coquetting with Holy Water, preaching Immaculate Conceptions, and not letting his left hand know that his right hand had renounced the Bishop of Rome—when a visitor like Challis might accrue at any moment at Royd Rectory, as per promise given eight months ago? Why?—simply because he felt that the bridge of his own liberality, however long the span of it, was not enough to cover the great gulf! And there was Ahriman, chuckling all the while!

“I am given to understand that Mrs. Steptoe is a good plain cook,” was Challis’s answer to the Rector’s question. Something in the manner of it seemed to throw doubt on his good faith. Otherwise, why seek confirmatory evidence, as his hearers seemed to do?

“I suppose you dine at home?” said the Rector, going to the point.

“I don’t judge so much by that. It wouldn’t be fair to do so, because I gather that in our house the flues don’t act, and the best kitchen-coal at twenty shillings has no burn in it, and goes to cinder in no time. Also we have no saucepans the right size. Also our greengrocer supplies us with potatoes which on peeling turn out irregular polyhedrons. So it doesn’t do to be biassed by what we get to eat. But I am convinced she is a good plain cook.”

Lady Arkroyd was accepting all Challis said in the spirit of Bradshaw. A territorial lady knows nothing of the small domesticities of any middle class. The Rector, perceiving a danger ahead—a new-born interest in the peculiar potatoes obtaining in suburban villas—headed Lady Arkroyd off just as she had begun, “What very curious pota . . . !” without a smile.

“Challis isn’t in earnest,” said he. “It’s only his chaff.”



Her ladyship said, "Oh!" and looked puzzled—awaited enlightenment. Challis laughed, admitting jurisdiction. But he pleaded in extenuation of his offence that it was difficult to fight against the conviction that Mrs. Steptoe was a good plain cook—whatever direct evidence there was to the contrary—in the face of her apron and the material of her dress, her punctual attendance at Chapel, her handwriting and its blots, her arithmetic and its totals. She really had all the qualities of a good plain cook, except the bald and crude ability to do plain cookery—a thing no one who looks below the surface ever bothers over.

"I'm afraid the good woman's a bit of a humbug," was Athelstan Taylor's conclusion. It was welcomed by the lady, as a relief to the necessity for smiling in a well-bred way—a Debretticent way, call it—while queer arrivals from below uttered paradoxes on Olympus.

Judith might be late; she was at Thanet. Challis pretended he hadn't known this. But he knew well enough that the young lady had forgiven the Castle, because they were going to have theatricals; and she, with an imputed experience, had been petitioned to accept the principal part. All this was in her last letter, written to Challis at his club. It had also told him that William Rufus, her brother, would not be at Royd for a few days, as he was busy in town over the Great Idea, which was going to be a very great Idea indeed, as some men had come forward and were going to put a good deal of Capital into it. Challis had said, "Dear me!—how like!..." and had not finished the sentence.

A little thing occurred that amused the novel-monger's heart and stirred his sympathies. When he began talking with his hostess and the Rector, he had turned his back on the chit and the young soldier. When, as the Rector's departure provoked dispersal, he looked their way again—behold!—they had vanished, as by magic. "I think," said the second chit, "they have gone for a walk to Fern Hollow." And thenceforward there was a consciousness about this young couple and their destiny between Mr. Challis and the second chit. For had she not detected his thought about them, when his eyes looked for them and found them not?

The other visitors, some of whom were as identical with those of September as circumstance permits in such a case, were scattered about elsewhere, subject to well-grounded confidences that they would be back to dinner. And the only important variation of identity among these was that one had become a Confirmed Christian Scientist. Challis didn't know whether he was expected to be glad or sorry.

He became somehow aware that her ladyship was going to drive to Thanet Castle accompanied by the second chit, to bring Judith back. Also that he was not going to be asked to accompany her. "*What* is Mr. Challis going to do if we all forsake him?" spoken with a sweet smile, left no doubt on the point. Mr. Challis had a letter he must write; so that was settled.

"You haven't got a letter to write, Challis," said the Rector at the front gate, to which both had walked in company. "Come some of the way with me, and talk as profanely as you like. I won't go fast." For the resolute stride of a pedestrian had made Challis cry for mercy in September.

"Yes—it was a lie about the letter," said he. "But it was good and unselfish in me to tell it. Saved bother, in fact! Can you wait two minutes while I put on walking-boots?"

"I can wait five, luckily; which I take it is your meaning." He waited six, beguiling them by letting the gate swing to and fro, and noting what a long time it took to reach equilibrium. "Wait a second," said he to Challis, arriving booted at the end of the fourth experiment. "Let's see how long it means to go on!" And then, having settled the point, the two were walking along the great avenue through the murmur of the beeches, conscious of a dispute between the woodlands and the hay-fields as to which was adding the sweeter flavour to the air of heaven.

Neither spoke at first. Then Challis said, as though still thinking over recent words: "Why 'as profanely as I liked'? I am a Profane Author, certainly, in the old sense of the word. Was that what you meant?"

"Why—yes! That is, if that was the sense you used the word in the last time we talked together, in September. Do you remember? You said you always had diabolical



promptings towards profanity in the presence of anything sacred. Then you said my cloth was conventionally sacred, and that made matters worse."

"I remember. We were getting very candid. You said you liked it."

"So I did. I said what I said just now because I wanted to go on where we left off. We were just going to quarrel healthily when Mr. Brownrigg pointed out that in the millennium of Graubosch the impious man would have no cause for despondency. The class of Insulated Ideas, evolved from the theory of Metaphysical Checks, will at once provide the Dogmatist with materials, and the Blasphemer with an object to give his attention to. . . ."

"I remember. If I belonged to the latter class, I shouldn't be a Grauboschite. Too much like Temperance Drinks, that make you feel as if you were drunk. . . ." Challis arrested his own speech, as if he had had enough of triviality, and spoke seriously. "I want you to tell me something, without any reserve."

"Go on. I will, if I can."

"You read one of my books, I know . . . what!—two more since September!—fancy that! . . . Well—what was your impression? As to what we are speaking of, I mean. Did it strike you that I made light of subjects usually held sacred?"

"It struck me that you did not hold them sacred. I do not mean a syllable more than I say. Your writing, so far as I have read it, is negative."

"I have wished to keep it so. Why should any author try to disturb or unsettle beliefs that he cannot replace—even by a Metaphysical Check? You remember what I said to you last year, just the other side of where the brook runs across the road on its own account, by the little footbridge? . . . well!—it was quite true. I have no antipathy to any beliefs of other people, having none of my own. I merely take exception to the recitation of Creeds."

"Even when the reciter is free to choose silence."

"If he stands up it comes to the same thing."

"He needn't unless he likes. At least, in my Church."

"Then suppose he *does* believe some of it, is he to jump up and down? There must be what my Bob calls a good

few persons who believe the first seven and the last four words of the Creed . . . well!—the regular Creed—you know which one I mean . . . and you could hardly expect them to sit still all through the business part of the recitation and cut in at the end.”

“ You’re only half serious, Challis. Your inveterate propensity to quips of thought and paradox, as it is called, misleads you and spoils your talk. Surely a declaration of faith is an intrinsic necessity in a communion? How can it exist otherwise?”

“ You must keep the disbelievers out—is that it?” Challis thought it time for a cigar. When he had got it lighted, he resumed: “ Yes!—as a means of constructing communions, Creeds are invaluable. The communion that had none would be too big. As for me, I never can help thinking of those lines:

“ ‘ One all too sure of God to need  
That token to the world without  
Of homage paid by faith to doubt,  
The recitation of a Creed.’ ”

. . . . Where do they come from, did you say? ‘ In Memoriam,’ I suppose.”

“ Can’t recollect them! . . . I wish you would tell me what you understand by the word ‘ believe.’ ”

“ I’m very doubtful. It just depends on how I use it. When I tell my wife that I believe her letter has gone to the Post, my meaning is clear. I mean that I didn’t see it on the hall-table when I last looked. When I say that I believe I am engaged on Thursday, it is equally unmistakable. I mean that I don’t want to meet the So-and-so’s at your house, morning-dress. But when I say, as I am apt to do, that I believe in God Almighty, I do so with a misgiving that my meaning is not intelligible to myself. Perhaps I regard my speech as a civility to the absolutely Unknown—I really couldn’t say. Or it may be I only use it in fulfilment of a convention which, so long as I comply with its conditions, binds all the other signatories not to bother.”

“ You always make me think you are going to be serious, and then you go off at a tangent. I never have any doubt what I mean by the word . . . ”



“What, for instance?”

“Whatever my mind does not question, I believe.”

“Then the Creed might be reworded, ‘I don’t and won’t question the existence of God the Father,’ and so on. Somehow it doesn’t sound convincing.”

“Because it seems to imply that the question is an open one.”

“And saying you believe it doesn’t? I’m agreeable, if you’re satisfied. But, then, you see, I stop away from Church, by hypothesis. And I should do so just the same if the re-wording were made. Nokes and Stokes and Styles and Brown and Thompson in a row, shouting that they didn’t and wouldn’t question the existence of God Almighty, would keep me out just as much as if they said they ‘believed’ in Him.”

They walked on a little in silence, the Rector very thoughtful. Presently he said, rather as one who comes to a sudden conclusion: “My definition of the word doesn’t cover it. One means more . . .”

“And doesn’t exactly know what,” said Challis.

“Precisely. But isn’t it possible that the common use of a word long received among many people may, from the habit of its usage, acquire a meaning to each and all alike, and yet continue to baffle definition?”

“Very possible indeed, and certain. I know a case in point. I went to a sort of spiritualistic *séance* once, and in the course of operations the audience was requested to *will* powerfully. To my surprise, all the *habitués* seemed prepared to comply as a matter of course. One young man said, ‘How?’ but was sat upon by public opinion. I heard him after ask a friend, ‘How did *you* will?’ And the reply was: ‘I held my breath and caught firmly hold of four-and-sixpence in my breeches pocket. How did you?’ He answered that he had shut his eyes tight and thought of his toes. But all the faithful—these two were **outsiders**, like myself—seemed to know what to do; and did it right, I suppose, because an accordion played. They had found out what *willing* meant, by habit and telepathic interchange. Probably believers know in the same way what is meant by belief. But it’s no use outsiders holding their breath and thinking of their toes.”

This sort of chat continued till the two reached the Rectory. It is given in the story to throw light on the friendship that sprang up between two such opposites, or seeming opposites.

When one walks part of the way home with a friend, Euclid's axioms get flawed sometimes, for the whole of the way is no greater than its part. Challis went all the way to the Rectory, of course ; said he wouldn't come in, of course ; said he mustn't sit down, of course ; did so, of course ; and kept his eye on his watch, of course. Having complied with all forms and precedents, he started to walk back.

His short visit had given him odds and ends of human things to think of. That was the Rector's sister-in-law, that dry lady who had made him feel tolerated ; and that other one who had begged him not to throw his cigar away was only an old friend. Challis was sorry the reverse was not the case, for the Rector's sake. He felt that the old friend might be kissed with advantage to the kisser, while the officially permissible peck of the dry lady's cheek could not be a source of satisfaction to any connoisseur. It was a thought entirely on his friend's behalf—he himself was indifferent. However, he might be wrong. The dry lady seemed very congenial to the two little girls, her nieces, who, it appeared—hurriedly, for his visit was short—had engaged a nurse for their baby. Challis suspected that a dispute between the two children, which the dry lady peremptorily silenced, turned on a question of paternity. Which of them was to be the baby's papa ? It seemed late in the day for considering the point, thought Challis. The oldest sister was *always* the papa, said that claimant ; and confirmed it by adding, "Eliza Ann says so, and she knows." The colloquy was half-heard, but this seemed the upshot.

That little Eliza Ann in the blue cotton dress—the nurse in this drama—was, of course, the little girl whose mouth was too large for beauty ; Mrs. Steptoe's brother's child. How small the world was ! "So is the kid herself, for that matter," was Challis's reflection thereon ; a typical instance of the whimsical way his mind twisted things. He would have said it aloud with perfect gravity to any hearer, had he had one.



She was a nice little wench, anyhow, the nurse, with her great big eyes and her Cockney-up-to-date accent. Also Challis had noted her quickness in repeating words just heard. "The biby is on no attount to be wyked," she had said, with an earnest sense of the reality of her part. "*O si sic omnes !*" Challis had thought to himself.

But the nurse forgot herself the moment after, saying : "I must sow this biby to my daddy, tomollow—maten't I ?" However, she resumed her part at once, on assurance given. She was certainly to show that baby to her daddy. And he would feel it, and see how fat it was. Thereon Challis had remembered what had till then escaped his mind, that Mrs. Steptoe's brother was eyeless and half legless. Oh, what an indurated baby, for an appreciator dependent on touch alone ! And, oh, the stony glare of its eyes fixed on the zenith, when roused from sleep by a practicable wire in its spine !

A man with a permanent source of disquiet always lights on something to remind him of it, go where he may. Challis had succeeded on his way from London in persuading himself that the warmth of his own farewell to Marianne had been more than skin-deep, whatever hers was ; and had felt that he could justifiably stand his own self-reproaches over, and enjoy the day that was passing, without remorse. And then what must he needs come across, of all things in the world, but a sister-in-law ! Not one certainly resembling in the least the sister-in-law of a decade past, whom she reminded him of ! There was nothing in this one of the girl who then, in the language of Oliver, bestowed herself like a ripe sister, and was accepted with a sense that she more than made up for a too mature mother-in-law, and put the advantages of marriage outside all question. Nothing of Marianne then or now, for that matter, in the dry lady personally ; but much to remind him of his own case in the way she had taken over the two little girls, much as Marianne had taken over Bob.

Was it his fault—the whole thing ? For there was a "whole thing" by now. He could not disguise that whole thing from himself, and that it was a thing that had somehow grown, slowly and surely, since the first days when

he and Marianne were rejoicing together in the dark front parlour of the Great Coram Street house over a letter just come from the publishers, Saxby's, Ltd., which accepted "The Spendthrift's Legacy," and named terms which led to a calculation that success, followed by a book per annum equally successful, would yield two thousand a year; and to castles in Spain, the building of which would have cost that sum twice over.

Or, if not from that hour exactly, it had grown since the days of the success that followed. It was hard to say when it began. Was he aware of it—of "the whole thing"—when Marianne refused to go with him to Lady Horse's because the Honourable Mrs. Diamonds had been rude to her first, and encouraged her after? These were not the ladies' real names, but everything else held good. Marianne had then said that once was quite enough, and she knew all along exactly how it was going to be, ever since that woman in skirts had given herself such airs—a reference to a previous delinquent. Oh dear!—now suppose the Honourable Diamonds had not "encouraged" her—how then? Anyhow, Challis could see now, too late, what he ought to have done. He ought to have taken bulls by the horns, and bits in his teeth, and opportunities by their forelocks, and said flatly that *he* wouldn't go to Lady Horse's unless Marianne came, too. It was his going that once without her that had done it! And all because of the confounded good-nature of that diamond woman, who must needs go *encouraging* her. That was what hurt the most, a thousandfold. The Diamonds might have stood on Marianne's lilac silk all day long, and broken that little crickly man's arm with her fan, if she chose, and her victim would have forgiven it. But when she came off, she scarcely apologized. And then, after that, to *encourage her*!

Still, in those days he was not aware of "the whole thing" that had "come about." Suspicion that something was amiss was followed by belief that the something had melted away. Intermittent phases succeeded, now and then with an appearance of concession to Society on Marianne's part; occasional acceptances of invitations to houses where Challis innocently hoped all had gone well,



till he found himself driving home with a hurt and silent lady, and came to know that the very things he had fondly fancied almost angelic ebullitions of sweetness in their hostess were really only the woman's impertinence ; and that what seemed to him good-humoured informality in her daughters was nothing but that sort of hoydenishness that seemed to be thought the proper thing nowadays. He could recall many incidents of this description, yet none that seemed to warrant the evolution of married discomfort—of disintegrated family life—that kept on gaining slowly, slowly on his resistance to it.

It had intensified, he knew, since his first visit to Royd in September. It was mixed up with his professional association with Judith Arkroyd. It *was* a professional relation, and nothing else. He called the ancestral beeches of the family to bear witness to the utter impossibility of its being anything else. If he, Alfred Challis, ex-accountant, ephemeral scribbler of an empty day, was conscious of a certain warmth in his admiration for that lady, that was *his* concern—not even the business of the beech-trees, or the new young fern he was treading under-foot. It would remain a buried secret, unknown to all men, most of all to Judith herself. He would even, as an act of discipline, never think of it but to question its reality, as he did now. It was to die, and should do so. At least he could keep his own counsel about this soul-quake, heart-quake, self-quake—call it what you will !—admitting that one existed. If he failed to do so successfully, would he be the first man that had ever loved two women, and been forced to hide away his love for one from the other and herself ? But he was obliged to admit that this was the first time he had allowed the word “love” to be heard in his intercourse with himself on this subject, even as an hypothesis.

He was relieved to observe the pleasure he felt in the thought that, at any rate, Polly Anne need never know anything about it. *She* need never have any real cause for a moment's disquiet. Of course, any *groundless* suspicions she might choose to nourish were entirely her own look-out. He could only recognise those that had a warrant in reality. She should not be provided with materials

for any such. Of course, Polly Anne *was* Polly Anne, after all, and her happiness must always be a first consideration with him. Think of all their old days together ! Think of his hours of acute misery, when that young monkey Emmie, five years ago, must needs imperil her mother's life and her own by her indecent haste to see the World. Think, never too often, of his gratitude to her when she took him, a mere derelict, in tow, ten years since, and piloted him into safe waters. Think as much as possible of her many nursings of him—of the many pipes they had virtually had together, though he was the operative smoker—of the many welcomes he had looked forward to. And as little as possible of the shortness of temper that had certainly grown upon her, but was very likely only a phase of health that would one day pass away and be forgotten. Remember that confounded little monkey—bless her ! of course—and be forbearing to her mother.

There was one thought about her that twisted and tortured this victim of over-self-examination beyond all reason. Look how utterly, how almost terribly, Polly Anne had replaced poor Kate ! Surely the Great Unknown had made a record in cruelty when he created Love the Monopolist ! Why feel shocked because, after Kate had ceased, her sister had taken over her inheritance so thoroughly ? Besides, this entire supersession of poor Kate showed him how really devoted he was to Marianne, and how safe he and she were from intrusions from without. It never struck him as strange that he should be seeking for assurance that he loved his own wife.

It probably would have done so, in time, if his reflections had not been interrupted at this point. The sound of the carriage—with Judith in it, no doubt—returning from Thanet. Saladin, the huge boarhound, coming on the scene first, examined Mr. Challis without any sign of recognition, and seemed to decide that he had nothing contraband about him. Then he waited till the carriage he had charge of came in sight, and trotted on. The import of his demeanour was that an appointment awaited him at the house, but that he could find time to see that carriage and pair to the door—if only it wouldn't dawdle !

Whether it was from consideration for Saladin, or



because it was haughty, that carriage hardly stopped. Its pause was barely long enough to say, through the mixed and hurried inspirations of its occupants, that it could bring itself to accommodate Mr. Challis on the front seat. Mr. Challis, alive to the importance of not sitting down on miscellanea, preferred walking; for all that the miscellanea professed readiness to be quite happy elsewhere. It was only a step to the house now. And Saladin was waiting. All right—go on!

Why should Challis feel something akin to pique because that carriage and pair took him at his word and went on, all right? Why need that unfortunate propensity of the foot-passenger beset him, the vice of mind that ascribes every action of a two-horse carriage to aristocratic pride? Perhaps he wanted to file an accusation against something or some one, and was not ready to admit that Judith's majestic smile and head-inclination had anything to do with it. Anyhow, the rest of his step to the house associated itself with a warm forgiving feeling towards Polly Anne the tiresome, the miffy; and an intensified sense of outsideness as to his own social whereabouts; the insideness being that of a fold with Sir Bernard Burke for shepherd, and Rouge Dragon and Garter King-at-arms for collie dogs.

He arrived at the house to find the world flocking to dress for dinner, or doing it already, out of sight. Flying cordialities from members of the family, unseen till then, or visitors known to him previously, intercepted him in his flight up the great staircase; but innuendoes from well-informed contemporaries that dinner was at a quarter to eight justified abruptness and pointed to opportunities for explanation. Challis escaped to his room, and found his external self of the evening to come—all but the head and hands he had on—laid out upon the bed, waiting patiently to be scrambled into in a hurry, and have its studs and buttons sworn at.

But he was not destined to be the last in the drawing-room, although he thought it could not be otherwise. For when he arrived at the foot of the stairs, it was with a consciousness on him of having heard, as in a waking dream, the sweetest possible drawl to the following effect: "It

was awl yaw fault. It wawsn't mine one bit," and a male reply, with the climax of human contentment in every syllable, "I'm jolly glad—it lasted so much longer!" and then a headlong rush to a chaotic toilette.

And that young man's appearance seven minutes later, looking as if butter wouldn't melt in his mouth, would have done honour to a lightning transformationist. But the distant manner of the guilty couple was carried too far, as everybody guessed all about it, and would have done so even without the furtive looks they exchanged from either end of a long table.



## CHAPTER XXVII

THE story has scarcely room for anything that was said or done at Royd until two days after the reunion that closed the last chapter. All it wants may be told in a few words. Challis was sulky all the rest of the first evening, and would not admit it to himself. Judith was dignified, glittering, and universal; talked to everybody, whereas Challis wanted her to talk to him. She was judicious, no doubt—woman of the world, and so on—but was it necessary to carry it so far? Surely Marianne in the background safeguarded the situation?

The party made itself at home rapidly, having begun at an advantage from previous experience. On the third day after its arrival any two members of it were ripe for arranging their day in each other's pockets, and treating their hosts as a sort of lay innkeepers of benevolent dispositions, but quite negligible. Challis had taken the latter at their word when they said he was to stop in his room and write all day if he liked. He had brought his MS. of "Estrild" with him, and had made up his mind to complete it. The play would have its value, even if the Estrild he had set his heart on, and had written the part for, decided on not attempting it.

For a doubt had crept into the scheme as it stood when Challis paid that visit to the sprained-ankle patient in Grosvenor Square. Something had influenced Judith since then; probably some passages of arms with her family. At least, so Challis surmised. But she had told him next to nothing, so far. Her passing lameness had occasioned a break in tentative readings of the play, in which others than herself had taken part; and during this interruption it had been evident that the young lady's ambition to fly in the face of Society and family tradition had undergone a change. But the invitation to Royd at Whitsuntide remained in black and white, and could not be gainsaid.

Therefore, Challis had found himself on that well-remembered lawn, as recorded in our last chapter, at the time appointed, with no misgiving on him at the moment as to the cordiality of his welcome. Nothing had happened to create one. But as the hours grew to a day, and then to days, he began to be conscious somehow that his hosts had towards him a feeling they were too well-bred to show ; and not only that, but that an indefinable discomfort had arisen between himself and Judith. Something had flawed the relation that each called friendship, and refrained from speculating about any other designation for. He had recognised this consciousness for the first time at that moment beside the carriage. And the reason he so readily accepted her ladyship's permission to indulge his inspirations *ad libitum* in his own room was that he felt it was a sort of release to him to do so. Was it a release for them also ?—for Judith ?

If this visit was to be no more than the fulfilment of an invitation to which his hosts stood pledged, let him work it out like a term of penal servitude, and go his ways at the end of it. But he chafed at the impossibility of challenging the position in any way. How in the name of common-sense could he say to the Baronet or her ladyship, “ I see through your persistent amiability of manner that your feelings towards this eminent author are not the same to a nicety as they were six months since, and I should like to review the situation with you, with a view to the removal of misunderstandings ” ?

Still less was it possible to say to Judith, “ You know that an indescribable change of manner has come over you in your demeanour towards your humble admirer, and he would give worlds to know the cause of it. But, in consideration of a certain effect you have upon him, of a certain exaltation he experiences in your presence, a certain depression at your absence, a very certain exasperation at any suspicion of a slight to him in favour of another male, he much doubts his powers of self-command through an explanatory interview. So he cannot ask questions. But if you could, with your womanly tact, frame some communication that would let him know what-the-anything it is all about, he would feel very grateful.”



The position was a delicate one, with that necessity in the background for locking his heart up tight, for the sake of Polly Anne, of whom—odd though it may seem—he never lost sight. Only he never actually formulated an admission of its delicacy. The nearest approach to it was when a sudden image of Mr. John Eldridge flashed across his mental bioscope, shut one of its eyes, and said, “Rather ticklish, Master Titus—eh?”

Very few people will understand the odd freaks of Challis’s mind, but it is useless to write this story and omit them.

There was only one thing he was absolutely clear about. Nothing the word *dishonourable* would apply to was admissible into any hypothetical drama his mind would construct, to cut the—rather hypothetical, please!—Gordian knot of his relation to Judith. He pictured himself to himself as potentially Don Juan, Captain Macheath, Silenus, or the late Prince Regent, as far as his normal ideas of morality went; but *he* was one thing, mind you, and Judith was another! She, being what she was, made any speculations in that department irrelevant. They did not arise from any question before the House. Besides—her position! Think of it!

He never contrasted his estimation of Judith now with his rough valuation of her at first sight. Just a handsome woman—the fine contents of an expensive, well-cut dress—a fit mate for fifty thousand a year, deer-forests in Scotland, houses in Park Lane, opera-boxes, and newspaper paragraphs! If he had done so, might he not have suspected, in the exaggeration of thought that placed her above and beyond suspicion, an element of danger more formidable to him than the imaginary laxity he was so ready to credit himself with. He might at least have seen the moral imbecility of what was virtually an appeal to Judith’s self-respect and integrity to protect him from his own weakness. Perhaps he had subcutaneous misgivings of the correctness of his insight into her character when he decided that it would never do to tempt confidences of a personal nature.

If a friendship between a man and a woman is to remain contented with itself, seeking neither promotion nor dissolution, there must not be present in it, on the part of

either, any longing to gain power over the other. Our own belief is that if Miss Arkroyd's self-love had not felt hurt at what seemed to her a too ready acceptance by Challis of the position in which a slight change in her manner had placed him, he might have paid his visit to Royd, gone back home, and maybe pretended to himself that the still waters of his inner soul had **never** been ruffled by Judith or any other fashionable enchantress. But a woman's pleasure in the power of her beauty is like that of dram-drinking. She may "swear off," as Rip Van Winkle did, a thousand times—but she will go back and do it again, or die for it. How can she help it, when a glance, a movement, a slight inexplicable intonation of her voice, is enough to bring back to bondage the idiot that thinks he has broken free? Why should she try to help it, from the point of view of self-interest, when she believes—as Judith did, without misgiving—that she can throw her end of the chain away at any moment, and wash her hands of that booby, and go on to another?

Judith believed her position was security itself, and was a little piqued at the readiness with which Challis had jumped at the permission to withdraw into his own sanctum. Whatever behaviour of her own had influenced this readiness, she resented it as an interruption to an assertion of power she was beginning to feel herself entitled to. Like the dram-drinker, she could not do without it. So, after three days of cordial civility, too dexterous to indite as a change of front, and equally dexterous postponement of Estrild for some future discussion, the young lady, without explanation, resumed the half-familiar, half-patronising tone Challis had become accustomed to in Grosvenor Square.

Some three days later it happened that this household decided on a sort of picnic known to it as "half-a-mile-off tea." A houseful of able-bodied servants made this festivity, which was exactly what its name implies, easily possible. All the most critical tea-drinker could want had gone before, and the house-party, or most of it, was straggling across the parkland to Fern Hollow, the place appointed. Challis and Judith were accidentally last.

A chance left him the only hearer of a voice dropped



languidly for the benefit of his ears alone. "Let these noisy people go on in front, Scroop," said its owner to him ; and then, in reply to his amused look at hearing himself so addressed, "I knew I should do it in the end, because of the newspaper reviews. Do you mind my calling you Scroop now and then, by accident?"

"Nothing can please me better," said he. "Biggest compliment you can pay me!" It started the soul-brush afresh, and he had to settle whether it was to be submission or protest. He fancied he could manage the latter even though he acknowledged the voice, that continued, "Suppose we go by Trout Bend! It's nonsense hurrying. The tea can wait. Or we can have fresh made." This was concession, both in the proposed *tête-à-tête*, and something in the familiarity of treatment, which seemed to savour more of the Hermitage than Grosvenor Square. But it was only the simple vocabulary common to all tea-worlds ; they are above class distinctions.

"Suppose we do," said Challis. And they did.

Trout Bend is a small incident in Geography. But it has a quality in common with—for instance—the Arctic Circle. It is always the same. Its lower segment has the same merry ripple over the same stones, and its upper one spreads to the same pools, that foster here and there each year the very selfsame bulrushes, to all appearance. And in the middle of the best one—the one, that is, that lends itself best to self-deception on the part of the fisherman—the fish that leaped last year, when you were looking at it and wondering how deep it was in the middle, does it again, and doesn't bore you. Because if he did, you wouldn't watch for him a third time. Only then he *doesn't* do it again, and that does bore you. And where the pools end and the ripples begin are the same infatuated stepping-stones, that think they can bear your weight, and can't. And then you become spell-bound on them as they wobble, and are rescued by extended walking-sticks from either side, and get across quite dry, or only a very little water in one shoe.

It was all the same this time, certainly, as when Challis was here in the autumn ; all but a black swimming-bird, who had nodded a great deal, and surprised him, but not

his companion—it was Athelstan Taylor—by diving suddenly and never coming up. The Rector had explained the ways of waterhens, and that this slyboots was still under some floating rubbish, with her nose out for breath. Challis remembered wondering whether the whole of this class of birds was feminine, and watercocks only existed in connection with the Company. There was none this time—neither cock nor hen—and the open pastureland this side the beech-covert was all ablaze with buttercups in the high grass. For the fallow-deer found their pasture farther from the house, and never a little tail wagged on a dappled back in sight of Challis and Judith as they crossed the bridge—one slice of an elm-tree, with the outline on it of its trunk of a hundred years ago.

“I suppose you know the legend of this bridge and the convict,” said the lady, turning to the gentleman.

“What legend of this bridge and what convict?” His inattention to his words was shown in the way he echoed them—sounds without meaning.

“You must have heard it. When he was a boy—the convict—he was sent with a small package containing a ring to a lady at Tallack’s Gate—one of the Cazenoves, I think it was—and on the way he thought it would be good fun to have a look inside his parcel. So he got the ring out, and, standing near this bridge, dropped it. He hunted for it in vain, and then, in terror at his mishap, ran away. I never quite understood it, but I suppose in those days they convicted people very easily . . .”

“Much more than now! Was this chap convicted?”

“Yes—and sent to Botany Bay. Twenty years after, having served his time, he came back to England, married, and lived to be an old man, but always under a ban. One day he came here, to this spot, with a grown-up daughter, to whom he then told the whole tale for the first time. When he finished he said to her; ‘I was standing just where you are when I dropped it.’ She said, ‘Here on the ground, or here on the bridge,’ and touched the plank with her parasol. The point of it slipped into a knot-hole in the wood, and when she drew it out, something glittered on it. It was the ring.”

Challis was in the habit of inventing horrors for serials,



and had had some success. But it chanced that he had never before heard this story—which, by the way, is told in connection with more than one locality in England—and he envied the master-hand that had fashioned it. He told in exchange the tale of the man who brought what he thought was his wife out of a house on fire, too black for recognition by his scorched and dazzled eyesight, and sat with his hand in hers till a strange voice came from the lips, and asked if the lady had been got out, naming his wife. “But your story is more probable,” he said in conclusion. “A man would know....”

“Know his own wife’s hand? Of course he would! But are we under any obligation to sup full of horrors on a day like this?” Her voice was that of indifference, dismissing an unpleasant topic. Challis slightly resented its placidity, which looked as if the horrors had been easily digested, at least. It seem to him to do injustice to a sweetness of disposition he chose to consider inseparable from the beautiful eyelids at ease under a slight protest of raised brows—the beautiful lips that waited unclosed for an answer to their question.

“What do you prefer me to talk about?” said he. “The crops? The weather?”

“Nonsense, Scroop!” She paused in her walk, so that he had either to look round at her or show no wish to know why. “I suppose you must have guessed,” she said, without logical continuity. A request for explanation would have been warranted.

But Challis was in no mind for make-believe. He took her meaning, which he knew quite well, for granted. “I have had my suspicions,” said he. “But I could not catechize, as you seemed so silent. Tell me now!... Which is it?—mother?—father?—sister? . . . Is it Sibyl?—or the Bart?—or the *madre*?” The way in which these familiar designations were accepted as a matter of course showed how their relations of last September had defined and strengthened themselves.

“All three. At least—I ought to be fair—my father least of all! Indeed, I believe that if an instance could be found of any lady of William the Conqueror’s taking part in a Court performance, he would concede the point

altogether. Has he spoken to you about it ? . . . Well !—of course he wouldn't do that. But has he 'approached the subject' ? Of course, that is what he would do—'approach the subject.' ”

“No—no one has said a word about it. But I guessed, soon after I came down, that the play was doomed. I did not at first suppose it was your family, as a matter of course. I thought you might have settled to throw it up on your own account.” She made a sort of impatient disclaimer—a head-shake that flung that possibility aside, and forgot it. But she said nothing, and he continued : “There was a row, I suppose ? Don't tell me more about it than you like. Don't tell me anything if you. . . .”

“I prefer to tell you. Who is there that I can talk to about it if not to you ?” This was the soul-brush again ; and again Challis's inner consciousness gasped at the choice he had to make between giving way to a luxury, a dangerous intoxication, and attempting to freeze the conversation down to a safe temperature.

Duty dictated a struggle for the latter. He affected a manner of equable unconcern fairly well. “No one,” said he, “unless you were to make a confidante of . . .” He stopped short of saying “Marianne,” conscious of difficulties ahead. But he could shelve the side-issue, and fall back on the previous question with a sense of getting out of shoal water. “There *was* a row, then . . . well !—a warm discussion, suppose we say ? It's more refined, certainly. What form did it take ?”

“Then we mustn't go so quick,” said Judith. “Or I shan't have time.” She was inconsecutive ; but it was clear, when she paused in her walk through the long grass, that it was for an anchorage. “Suppose we sit down a little here,” she said. “Unless you mind ?” Challis didn't.

“Here” was an oak trunk that must have said to itself when it was a sapling—four hundred years ago, maybe—“I will see to it, when I am grown up, that my roots shall live above ground, and be thick with moss ; and one shall be horizontal and a seat for a king, who shall lean against me contented. But he shall go, that lovers may come ; and they shall make up *my* contentment, and I shall hear their voices in the twilight.” Challis half made this little legend



as he took his place by Miss Arkroyd on that tree-trunk. But he fought shy of the sequel their presence suggested—what word ought his fancy to supply as the tree's imaginary speech about themselves? He shrank from it, and he knew the reason why. It was because, as his own disordered passion grew, as he found himself more and more at loggerheads with his lot, he became more and more alive to the danger of relying on this woman *herself* as his protection against *himself*. How if *she* gave way, too?

As far as any conscious loss of self-control at that moment went, on the part of Miss Judith Arkroyd, Challis need not have fretted. Never was a young woman more perfectly cool and collected, more equal to any occasion that might arise in connection with a love of power that she just felt this man was a satisfactory lay-figure for. That best defines all the feeling she had on his account—so far.

She resumed the conversation where the question of anchorage had interrupted her. "I don't think we have rows in our family, in the ordinary sense of the word. That is, if I understand it rightly. . . . No!—I know what you are going to say. It has nothing to do with that repose that marks the caste of Vere de Vere. It is entirely individual and local. We have our quarrels, of course, but they take the form of distant civility, entirely due, as I understand, to our self-respect. There is nothing we Arkroyds respect more than ourselves, not even the Bill of Rights or the Protestant Succession. . . ."

Challis interrupted: "But the distant civility, this time? . . ."

"Followed naturally on my telling Sibyl that the first act of Estrild was ready for rehearsal. She merely said she supposed I must go my own way. But that day after lunch she allowed me to leave the apartment first. It had been a cold lunch, as far as emotions went; and I knew, when Sibyl stood courteously on one side to let me pass, what was coming. So I wasn't the least surprised to find a letter from my mother on the dressing-table next morning."

"A letter from your mother!" Challis's tone was puzzle, awaiting enlightenment. Judith was not to be hurried, though. For one thing, she was engaged with a

beetle, who wanted either to go home or to get farther away from home. She had been heading off his successive rushes in different directions with an ungloved hand, which he always refused to crawl upon. The perseverance she gave to this seemed not altogether without its charm to her companion.

“ He seems to be praying for those that despitefully use him,” she said, referring to the action of his antennæ. Then, without discontinuing her amusement, she went back to the conversation. “ Yes—a letter, with ‘ My dearest daughter ’ at the beginning, and ‘ Your affectionate mother ’ at the end. Do you not believe me ? It’s quite true—all my family do it ! In fact, it was a long time before I found out that other families didn’t do it, too. I can tell you this letter all through.”

Then in a semi-humorous, indifferent way she gave alternately its actual wording and the upshot of some of its passages. Lady Arkroyd hoped she had been misinformed about her daughter’s intentions. She was aware that she had no longer any legal control over her, and she made no appeal to anything but her good feeling. She would not comment on the character of the associates with whom her daughter would probably be brought in contact. She would limit what she had to say entirely to the underlined deep grief that Sir M. and herself would experience if their child persisted in a course which could only lead to degradation and disgrace. She then forgot her promise to say nothing against the profession, and gave a brief sketch of it founded on Hogarth’s “ Strolling Players.” After which she wound up with an exhortation to her daughter not to break her father’s underlined heart in his underlined old age. “ And so on,” said Judith, in placid conclusion, still continuing her persecution of the beetle. Challis’s infatuation believed that all this was *parti pris*—mere bravado ; and that his insight saw truly a hinterland of devoted affection to her parents, and consideration for the comfort of beetles. Such is the power of beauty !

“ And that letter determined you to give up the drama ?”

“ Oh no !—it was only the beginning of it. I wrote in reply, saying I was sorry to give pain to such an exemplary parent as my papa—that was not the wording, only the



sense—but that I had made up my mind, and was not prepared to disappoint you in order to keep up the traditions of a rather dreary respectability. I said you had written this part for me, and I had promised to play it, and that ended the matter. My ancestors had always kept their promises, and I should keep mine. I laid a good deal of stress on Sibyl.” At this point the beetle got away cleverly, threatening a break in the conversation. This was not what Challis wanted.

“ I don’t understand,” said he. “ Why ‘stress on Sibyl’ ?”

“ I mean on Sibyl’s being allowed to indulge all her fancies, at any cost; and to take up trade, too—a thing that our ancestors would not have tolerated for a moment. Why is the Great Idea to be capitalised with thousands ? . . .”

“ And Shakespeare’s trade discountenanced ? I see, and agree in the main. I suppose they said it wasn’t a trade—the Great Idea ?”

“ They did. Sibyl said it was Guilds and Crafts, and Mediæval, and quite another thing. Perhaps it is ; I don’t know. But I’m sure ‘*Sibyl Arkroyd Limited*,’ is neither Mediæval nor Guilds, and that’s what they propose to call it.”

“ It sounds like six three-farthings, and pay at the desk. They can hardly be in earnest.”

“ Well, I don’t know ! People of—of condition are getting to take such curious views of things. It’s nothing nowadays for a Countess to promise punctual attention to orders. Was it you told me there was a Curate who preached a Sermon on the New Atheism in its relation to Socialism ? . . . No ?—oh, then, it was somebody else !”

Challis suspected that Judith was talking in this way to defer telling him the upshot of the family discussion. He said nothing, and the flight of a heron filled out a lapse into silence which followed. And then Judith, who had risen from the tree-root to watch the vanishing bird, turned to Challis, and resumed :

“ Shall we go on ? . . . Oh, what was I talking about ? Sibyl and the Great Idea. Well !—you see, the thing worked out like this : Papa had been wavering a good deal about financing the Great Idea, and Sir Spender Inglis had become very restive indeed, and was ready to jump at any excuse for backing out of his undertaking. He saw

his opportunity, and pointed out—like Mr. Brownrigg—that my logic was irresistible, and that it was impossible to forbid my appearing on the boards if Sibyl was to be allowed to go behind the counter. A recent slump in Kaffirs had fostered economical impulses, I suppose. Anyhow, if I surrender the stage conditionally, my parent will keep his money in his pocket.”

“Won’t Sibyl Limited get it somewhere else?”

“She thinks she will, and my brother thinks so, no doubt. But will they? Perhaps you know about these things. I don’t.”

“I know little or nothing,” said Challis. “But I understand that the chief point is settled. You won’t play Estrild.” There was no affectation of unconcern in his manner now.

The two walked on together along the river-brink of Trout Bend in silence; until, leaving the river, a path, winding through scattered gorse and fern, brought them in sight of the picnic party in the shade of a great beech, the vanguard of the deep woods beyond. Then Judith stopped and said: “I suppose you are angry with me?”

To which Challis replied, with vexation in his voice: “I could have forgiven you more than that.” Said as a politeness this speech would have meant, “That is a mighty small matter to forgive you for.” Said with a gasp, or something like it, it meant, to Judith’s ears, that she had been winding that skein—this man’s life, you see!—too quickly round her finger. He might become embarrassing.

“You will find another Estrild,” she said. An attempt at a laugh failed, and its failure was worse than its omission would have been.

“I shall not try,” said he. And then his evil genius saw his chance, and made Alfred Challis conceive that he could, for the release of his soul, make a false fetch of what he would have liked to say, in terms of a parallel line of thought. “I care little or nothing for the play for its own sake. My interest was in your presentation of the leading part.” The words were safe, so far as they went—might have been spoken to a male actor who had taken another engagement. But he could not leave it there. That Evil Genius must needs make him go on speaking, with more



and more betrayal of the great share she whom he addressed had personally in his visible chagrin. Visible in the restless movement of his hand about his face. And audible in the way he crushed his words out, cut them short on their last letter, threw them behind him: "Listen to me, and believe what I say. I count the play not worth completion now. With you the life goes out of it. It has become nothing for me." Then his voice fell, and whatever it had of petulance settled down to determination. "As for what is written of the play, I tell you plainly, I shall destroy it. At least, it shall never be acted by anyone else. . . . Stop one minute, and let me finish. I have not a word or a thought of blame for you, Judith Arkroyd. It was a mad idea—the whole thing! Now I see plainly that it never could have been. Let us forget it—all!"

The face that he spoke to was none the less beautiful that its owner was frightened at his vehemence. It continued to be—to this fool of a man who had not the courage to run away from it, but who was not at liberty to love it—the face of six months ago that had been growing on him ever since. He would almost have been thankful—though he would not confess it to himself—for visible flaws in it; a squint, a twist, an artificial tooth or two betraying their extraction, or their predecessors'. A wig would have spelt salvation, as the Press puts it.

As for Judith, she was perfectly alive, by now, to the subtleties of meaning woven into Challis's speech, for the easement of a feeling he could neither tell nor conceal. "Let us forget it all!" was so overtense in emphasis, if referring only to a disappointment about a part in a play, that it scarcely left room for an equable society response. Her tone of voice had to keep at bay any hint of a meaning that might have betrayed both into a recognition of the precipice they were so close to. As might have been expected, she lost her presence of mind, and overdid it. "I can't see any occasion for hysterics about it," said she. "Of course, I am awfully sorry, and all that sort of thing. But we live in a world, after all! And I suppose one must sometimes accommodate one's views to the necessities of Society. . . . Oh dear!—these people are quite close." She referred to their near approach to the assembled tea-

drinkers, some of whom, at peace with all mankind under its influence, were scattering abroad through the neighbouring woods and dingles, discussing religious education and the fighting power of nations, pigeon-shooting, and Psychical Research.

"We came away from the tree too soon," Challis said. "Can't we turn? . . ."

"Suppose we do. We can go round the coppice. . . . What was I saying? Oh—about Society! Don't you think it is so? One has to reckon with one's Social Duties. So I'm told."

"We could have thought of Society before," Challis said, rather sullenly. And then he felt brutal. "No, Judith Arkroyd, I won't say that. Forgive me! All I mean is—it was all just as true—what you say about Society—six months ago as it is now. The mistake was then."

A small thing in his speech unnerved Judith—the way he used her full name. This was the second time he had done so. It seemed to imply some new aspect of their relation—the throwing aside of some veil—the recognition of some discarded formality. She was no longer "Miss Arkroyd"; and "Judith" would have been either patronage or impertinence. In her case there was no professional name to build a half-way house to familiarity on.

She dropped her worldly tone as misplaced or useless, as she said: "I had at one time half thought I would leave you to finish the play before I cried off. But should I have done you any service? I thought not, in the end, and I wished to get it over."

He said: "It is over now. No harm is done. I would not have had it otherwise."

She replied: "Your work will not be lost. You will think better of it—better about destroying it, I mean. You will finish it, I hope."

"No—I think I shall probably destroy it. I hate having incomplete manuscripts hanging about. They keep me always in doubt whether to go on with them or not."

"Then give this one the benefit of the doubt, and finish it. Come!" She tried to *leggierire* the tone of the conversation, but it was a failure—worse than a failure, by the speech that followed on its provocation.



“I can have no woman play the leading part but you. It was written for you, and I have kept you in my mind as I wrote. I . . .” And then Alfred Challis stopped dead. But his speech, had he let it all out of his heart, would have been : “I have kept you in my mind, and now you will not leave it. You have crept into its secret corners, and rise up between me and my duty at every turn. It is not for nothing that those eyes of yours have flashed through every syllable of my very commonplace blank verse, that that voice of yours has filled out my imagination of a dozen soliloquies complying with the highest canons of dramatic art, that that hand of yours has caressed undeserving tyrants and stabbed innocent persons on insufficient provocation !” It would have been all this, for he would not have been himself if he had kept back his constant sense of the ridiculous, a term in which his mind included himself as a prime factor. But he said never a word further than what we have reported. Only the last particle, “I,” as good as contained all the rest.

Judith understood it all now—all that was needed—and began to find her breath and the pulsation of her heart—things one usually forgets—forcing themselves on her attention. Why need the former catch and trip, and clip or magnify her words ? Could not the last keep still ? Plague take human nature ! To think that she, Judith Arkroyd, mistress of herself in her own conceit, should be thus upset ; unable to steer her ship out of the currents of a semi-flirtation—granted, that much, Sibyl !—with a middle-aged scribbler, who meant to be bald, in a year or so !

Had Challis dared to look at her at that moment, he would have seen that she had lost colour, as she stopped beside a hawthorn with some pretence of gathering the pink may-bloom. No one gathers may without a knife, and what Judith really did was to get a passing stay, against a slight dizziness, from a hand rested on a bough in easy reach. The gathering pretence sanctioned Challis’s half-dozen paces in advance. But he did not look back at her—and it was well for him, perhaps, so beautiful was she against the may-tree—nor she at him. She knew, and he knew she knew.

Both were so conscious of their mutual consciousness

that they tacitly agreed to say nothing. But there was a difference of feeling due to their positions. Challis could not live with a Tantalus cup held to his lips, and was, moreover, constantly stung with the injustice to Marianne of admission of—entertainment of—submission to love for another woman. Poor dear old Marianne, at home there by herself! So he honestly wished to fly—fly from himself if you like to put it so—from Judith, at any rate, as her beauty had become insupportable, and to his home as a haven by preference, just to live this folly down and forget it.

And as for the young woman—well!—she didn't want to lose Challis altogether. She could see no reason why a sort of affectionate friendship should not be cherished between them, not she! It was in the nature of the animal, and it may be Challis had been entirely at fault in casting the part of Estrild, whom he had certainly not portrayed as a person who would be content, like Bunthorne, with a vegetable love. It may be also that the cold-blooded faculty Sibyl objected to in her sister was part of this nature. A pleasure in disconcerting married folks' confidence in each other may belong to systems without a heart. Only, biters are sometimes bit.

Whether or not what this lady said next, after the two had walked, a little way apart, exchanging neither look nor speech, until the tea-party came again in view—for they had made the circuit of the coppice-wood—whether this had anything to do with her wish to avoid a complete separation from her literary friend or not, we cannot guess. It may have, and yet she herself may not have known it.

"Marianne has never answered my letter," she said. "You knew I had written?"

"No," he replied. "I did not. What had you to say to Marianne?"

"I wrote to beg her earnestly once more to change her mind, and pay us a visit. We do wish her to come."

"What good would it do?" His question vexed Judith. Why could he not help her at least to shut her eyes to a change in their relation each had to know of, yet to seem, in self-defence, to ignore the other's knowledge of? He evidently had no intention of doing so.

"What good?" she repeated. "What an odd way of



putting it, Scroop ! Why—of course—only that it would be pleasant, and that we should be glad to have her ! I always feel that I should like to know her better, for my own part.” Her pique at his want of tact had been a bracing stimulus, and enabled her to put their talk more on its old footing. The subdued tone gave place to what was almost like that of those thoughtless, unembarrassed groups they were drawing so near to. How free from care everyone else does seem when one meets him out !

Of course, she threw off their late conversation—washed her hands of it—quicker than he could. But by the time they came within hearing of the nearest group, and heard the word *denominational*, and knew thereby that religious education was under discussion, Challis had shaken off the gloom or distraction that made his answer ring so false : “ You are kindness itself to Marianne. I wish she were more tractable.” Those were his words. They had sounded rather civil than true or heart-felt. But behind them, inexplicably, was a feeling akin to gratitude to Judith, who had somehow made it easier to his mind to go back to Marianne without a shock. Not that it would have been good form in him to acknowledge it !

In the pre-Shakespearian days of Love, did ever a King Solomon, we wonder, feel grateful to the last Harem capture for a courtesy shown to a disused, tolerated survival of other days ?

Challis was intercepted by the group of heated discontents, saturated with religious education. Judith passed on without looking at him, merely referring to the abstract truth, “ There is tea,” and leaving his teawardness to develop itself at leisure, or die of neglect. The huge board-hound left a sweet biscuit to meet her, and after exchanging a few words and a kiss, made believe that he had found her in the wilderness, and brought her in safety to refreshments, which it was distinctly understood that he was to share.

The conclave on religious education, like Polly’s employers after Sukey had taken the kettle off again—presumably—had all had tea, and were horridly indifferent about anyone else going without.

They were confident they might rely on Mr. Challis’s impartiality to distinguish between things that to the

casual observer might seem identical ; to assign due weight to considerations which the superficial observer would overlook ; and to sift and examine evidence which the prejudiced observer would be only too prone to reject.

Mr. Challis, appealed to to give an impromptu casting-vote on a variety of subjects, felt impartial and flattered. He could only contribute, he said, an absolute freedom from bias on the question of religious education. He regretted his total absence of information, the possession of which, in however small a degree, always adds weight to the decisions of the most unbiassed judgment. However, it soon became clear that all that was asked of him was that he should listen impartially to all three disputants, and hold his tongue *sine die* while they talked sixteen to the dozen. As he was not in a humour for talking, he had no objection to this.

END OF VOL. I.















